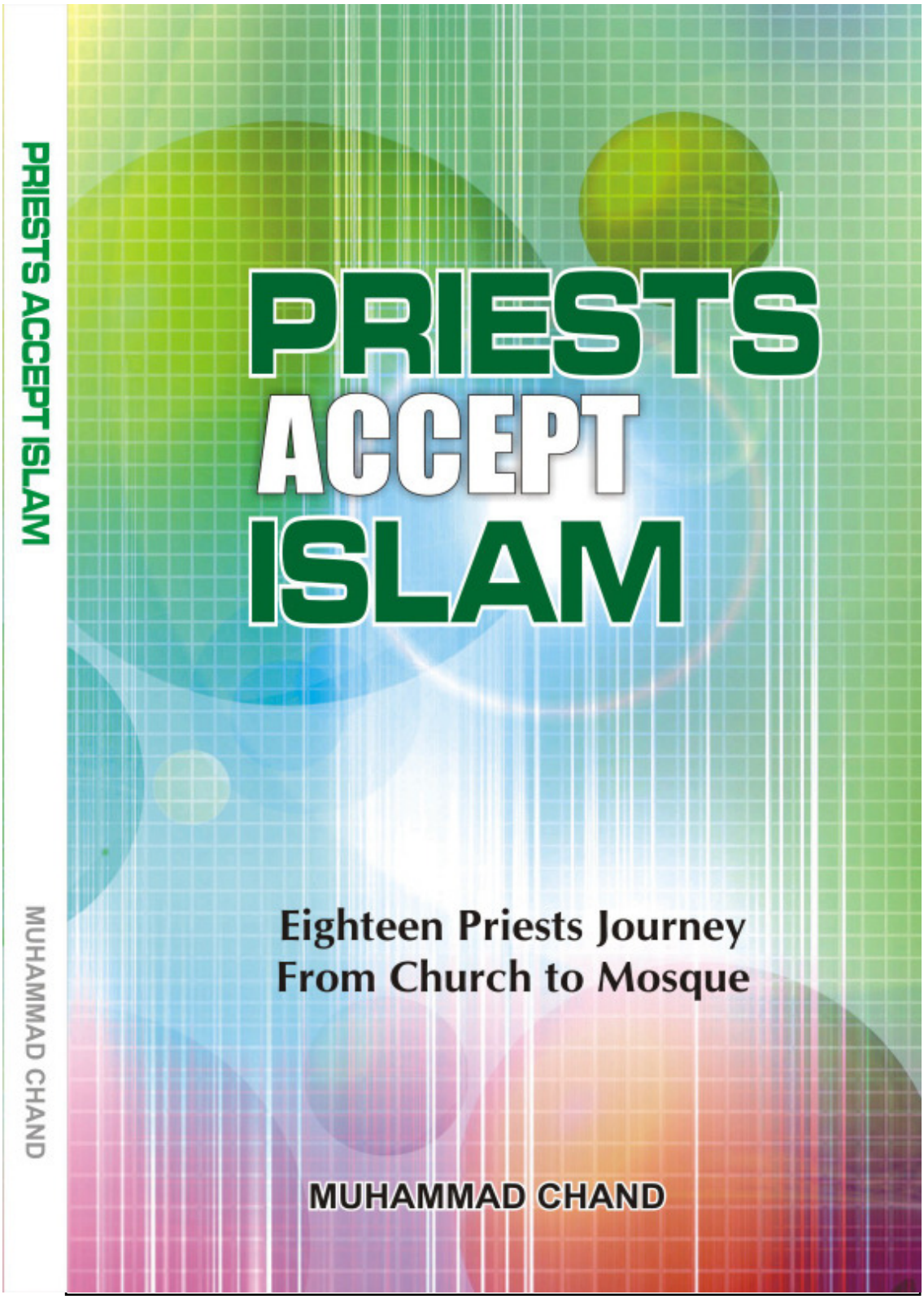
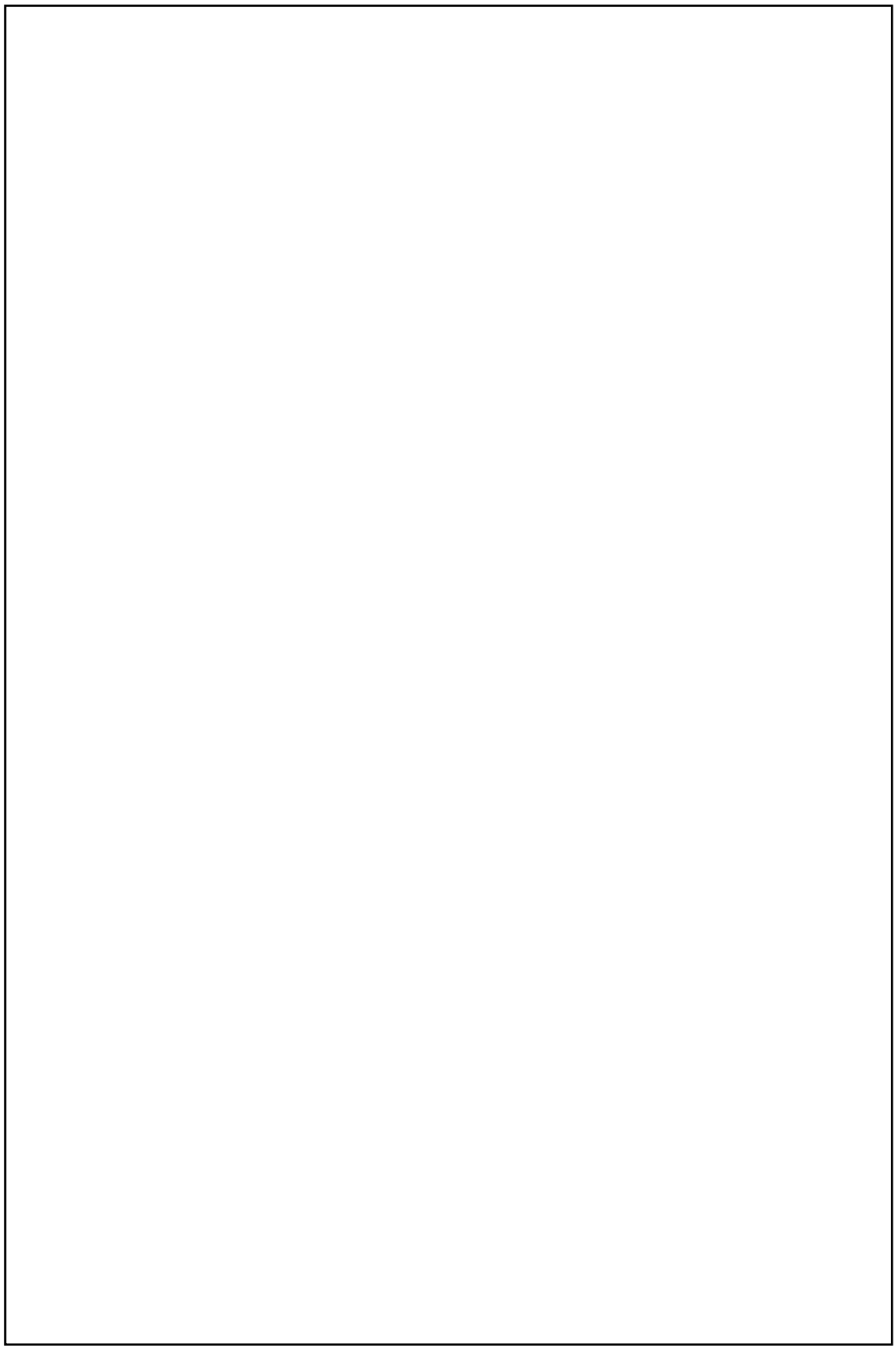

PRIESTS ACCEPT ISLAM
PRIESTS
ACCEPT
ISLAM
Eighteen Priests Journey
From Church to Mosque
MUHAMMAD CHAND
MUHAMMAD CHAND



In The Name Of Allah,
The Most Beneficent, The Most Merciful

PRIESTS
ACCEPT
ISLAM

Compiled by
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"And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognise the truth: they pray: "Our Lord! we believe; write us down among the witnesses." (Quran-5:83)

For Those Who Are In Search Of Truth

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1

Yusuf Estes

Former Preacher or Priest

U.S.A

The Conversion Story of Yusuf Estes, US Federal Prison Chaplain

The amazing tale of how an American former "born again" Christian and his father, both ordained ministers, plus their friend, a Catholic priest, all became convinced of the truth of Islam.

Many people ask me how a preacher or priest in Christianity can ever go to Islam, especially considering all the negative things that we hear about Islam and Muslims everyday. I would like to thank everyone for their interest and offer my humble story,

God Willing.
Yusuf Estes

I was born into a very strong Christian family in the Midwest. Our family and their ancestors not only built the churches and schools across this land, but actually were the same ones who came here in the first place. While I was still in elementary we relocated in Houston, Texas in 1949 (I'm old). We attended church regularly and I was baptized at the age of 12 in Pasadena, Texas. As a teenager, I wanted to visit other churches to learn more of their teachings and beliefs. The Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Charismatic movements, Nazarene, Church of Christ, Church of God, Church of God in Christ, Full Gospel, Agape, Catholic, Presbyterian and many more. I developed quite a thirst for the "Gospel" or as we say; "Good News." My research into religion did not stop with Christianity. Not at all. Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Metaphysics, native American beliefs were all a part of my studies. Just about the only one that I did not look into seriously was "Islam". Why? Good question. Anyway, I became very interested in different types of music, especially Gospel and Classical. Because my whole family was religious and musical it followed that I too would begin my studies in both areas. All this set me for the logical position of Music Minister in many of the churches that I became affiliated with over the years. I started teaching keyboard instruments in 1960 and by 1963 owned my own studios in Laurel, Maryland, called

"Estes Music Studios."

Over the next 30 years my father and I worked together in many business projects. We had entertainment programs, shows and attractions. We opened piano and organ stores all the way from Texas and Oklahoma to Florida. I made millions of dollars in those years, but could not find the peace of mind that can only come through knowing the truth and finding the real plan of salvation. I'm sure you have asked yourself the question; "Why did God create me?" or "What is it that God wants me to do?" or "Exactly who is God, anyway?" "Why do we believe in 'original sin?" and "Why would the sons of Adam be forced to accept his 'sins' and then as a result be punished forever. But if you asked anyone these questions, they would probably tell you that you have to believe without asking, or that it is a 'mystery' and you shouldn't ask.

And then there is the concept of the 'Trinity.' If I would ask preachers or ministers to give me some sort of an idea how 'one' could figure out to become 'three' or how God Himself, Who can do anything He Wills to do, cannot just forgive people's sins, but rather and had to become a man, come down on earth, be a human, and then take on the sins of all people. Keeping in mind that all along He is still God of the whole universe and does as He Wills to do, both in and outside of the universe as we know it.

Then one day in 1991, I came to know that the Muslims believed in the Bible. I was shocked. How could this be? But that's not all, they believe in Jesus as:

* a true messenger of God; * prophet of God; * miracle birth without human intervention; * he was the 'Christ' or Messiah as predicted in the Bible; * he is with God now and most important; * He will be coming back in the Last Days to lead the believers against the 'Antichrist.'

This was too much for me. Especially since the evangelists that

we used to travel around with all hated Muslims and Islam very much. They even said things that were not true to make people afraid of Islam. So, why would I want anything to do with these people?

My father was very active in supporting church work, especially church school programs. He became and ordained minister in the 1970s. He and his wife (my stepmother) knew many of the TV evangelists and preachers and even visited Oral Roberts and helped in the building of the "Prayer Tower" in Tulsa, OK. They also were strong supporters of Jimmy Swaggart, Jim and Tammy Fae Bakker, Jerry Fallwell, John Haggi and the biggest enemy to Islam in America, Pat Robertson.

Dad and his wife worked together and were most active in recording "Praise" tapes and distributing them for free to people in retirement homes, hospitals and homes for the elderly. And then in 1991 he began doing business with a man from Egypt and told me that he wanted me to meet him. This idea appealed to me when I thought about the idea of having an international flavor. You know, the pyramids, sphinx, Nile River and all that. Then my father mentioned that this man was a 'Moslem.' I couldn't believe my ears. A 'Moslem?' No way. I reminded my dad of the various different things that we had heard about these people, how they are; terrorists; hijackers; kidnappers; bombers and who knows what else? Not to mention that: they don't believe in God; they kiss the ground five times a day and they worship a black box in the desert.

No. I did not want to meet this 'Moslem' man. No way.

My father insisted that I meet him and reassured me that he was a very nice person. So, I gave in and agreed to the meeting.

But on my terms. I agreed to meet him on a Sunday after church so we would be all prayed up and in good standing with the Lord. I would be carrying my Bible under my arm as usual. I would have my big shiny cross dangling and I would have on my

cap which says: "Jesus is Lord" right across the front. My wife and two young daughters came along and we were ready for our first encounter with the 'Moslems.'

When I came into the shop and asked my father where the 'Moslem' was, he pointed and said: "He's right over there." I was confused. That couldn't be the Moslem. No way.

I'm looking for a huge man with flowing robes and big turban on his head, a beard half way down his shirt and eyebrows that go all the way across his forehead.

This man had no beard. In fact, he didn't even have any hair on his head at all. He was very close to bald. And he was very pleasant with a warm welcome and handshake. This didn't make sense. I thought they are terrorists and bombers. What is this all about?

Never mind. I'll get right to work on this guy. He needs to be 'saved' and me and the Lord are going to do it. So, after a quick introduction, I asked him:

"Do you believe in God?" He said: "Yes." (Good!) Then I said: "Do you believe in Adam and Eve?" He said: "Yes." I said: "What about Abraham? You believe in him and how he tried to sacrifice his son for God?" He said: "Yes." Then I asked: "What about Moses?" Again he said: "Yes." Then: "What about the other prophets, David, Solomon and John the Baptist?" He said: "Yes." I asked: "Do you believe in the Bible?" Again, he said: "Yes." So, now it was time for the big question: "Do you believe in Jesus? That he was the Christ of God?" Again the said: "Yes."

Well, now, this was going to be easier than I had thought. He was just about ready to be baptized only he didn't know it. And I was just the one to do it, too. I was winning souls to the Lord day after day and this would be a big achievement for me, to catch one of these 'Moslems' and 'convert' him to Christianity. I asked him if he liked tea and he said he did. So off we went to a little shop in the mall to sit and talk about my favorite subject:

Beliefs. While we sat in that little coffee shop for hours talking (I did most of the talking) I came to know that he was very nice, quiet and even a bit shy. He listened attentively to every word that I had to say and did not interrupt even one time. I liked this man's way and thought that he had definite potential to become a good Christian. Little did I know the course of events about to unravel in front of my eyes.

First of all, I agreed with my father that we should do business with this man and even encouraged the idea of him traveling along with me on my business trips across the northern part of Texas. Day after day we would ride together and discuss various issues pertaining to different beliefs that people have. And along the way, I could of course interject some of my favorite radio programs of worship and praise to help bring the message to this poor individual. We talked about the concept of God; the meaning of life; the purpose of creation; the prophets and their mission and how God reveals His Will to mankind. We also shared a lot of personal experiences and ideas as well.

One day I came to know that my friend Mohamed was going to move out of the home he have been sharing with a friend of his and was going to be living in the mosque for a time. I went to my dad and asked him if we could invite Mohamed to come out to our big home in the country and stay there with us. After all, he could share some of the work and some expenses and he would be right there when we were ready to go to out traveling around. My father agreed and Mohamed moved in.

Of course I still would find time to visit my fellow preachers and evangelists around the state of Texas. One of them lived on the Texas -- Mexico border and another lived near lived Oklahoma border. One preacher liked to a huge wooden cross that was bigger than a car. He would carry it over his shoulder and drag the bottom on the ground and go down the road or freeway hauling these two beams formed in the shape of a cross.

People would stop their cars and come over to him and ask him what was going on and he would give them pamphlets and booklets on Christianity.

One day my friend with the cross had a heart attack and had to go to the Veterans Hospital where he stayed for quite a long while. I used to visit him in the hospital several times a week and I would take Mohamed with me with the hopes that we could all share together in the subject of beliefs and religions. My friend was not very impressed and it was obvious that he did not want to know anything about Islam. Then one day a man who was sharing the room with my friend came rolling into the room in his wheelchair. I went to him and asked him his name and he said that it didn't matter and when I asked him where he was from he said he was from the planet Jupiter. I thought about what he said and then began to wonder if I was in the cardiac ward or the mental ward.

I knew the man was lonely and depressed and needed someone in his life. So, I began to 'witness' to him about the Lord. I read to him out of the book of Jonah in the Old Testament. I shared the story of the prophet Jonah who had been sent by the Lord to call his people to the correct way. Jonah had left his people and escaped by boat to leave his city and head out to sea. A storm came up and the ship almost capsized and the people on board threw Jonah over the side of the ship. A whale came up to the surface and grabbed Jonah, swallowed him and then went down to the bottom of the sea, where he stayed for 3 days and 3 nights. Yet because of God's Mercy, He caused the whale to rise to the surface and then spit Jonah out to return back home safely to his city of Nineveh. And the idea was that we can't really run away from our problems because we always know what we have done. And what is more, God also always knows what we have done.

After sharing this story with the man in the wheel chair, he looked

up and me and apologized. He told me he was sorry for his rude behavior and that he had experienced some real serious problems recently. Then he said that he wanted to confess something to me. And I said that I was not a Catholic priest and I don't handle confessions. He replied back to me that he knew that. In fact, he said: "I am a Catholic priest." I was shocked. Here I had been trying to preach Christianity to a priest. What in the world was happening here? The priest began to share his story of being a missionary for the church for over 12 years to south and Central America and Mexico and even in New York's 'Hell's Kitchen.' When he was released from the hospital he needed a place to go to recover and rather than let him go to stay with a Catholic family, I told my dad that we should invite him to come out and live with us in the country along with our families and Mohamed. It was agreed by all that he would so, he moved out right away.

During the trip out to our home, I talked with the priest about some of the concepts of beliefs in Islam and to my surprise he agreed and then shared even more about this with me. I was shocked when he told me that Catholic priests actually study Islam and some even carry doctors degrees in this subject. This was all very enlightening to me. But there was still a lot more to come.

After settling in, we all began to gather around the kitchen table after dinner every night to discuss religion. My father would bring his King James Version of the Bible, I would bring out my Revised Standard Version of the Bible, my wife had another version of the Bible (maybe something like Jimmy Swaggart's 'Good News For Modern Man." The priest of course, had the Catholic Bible which has 7 more books in it that the Protestant Bible. So we spent more time talking about which Bible was the right one or the most correct one, than we did trying to convince Mohamed about becoming a Christian.

At one point I recall asking him about the Quran and how many versions of it there were in the last 1,400 years. He told me that there was only ONE QURAN. And that it had never been changed. Yet he let me know that the Quran had been memorized by hundreds of thousands of people, in it's entirety and were scattered about the earth in many different countries. Over the centuries since the Quran was revealed millions have memorized it completely and have taught it to others who have memorized it completely, from cover to cover, letter perfect without mistakes.

This did not seem possible to me. After all, the original languages of the Bible have all been dead languages for centuries and the documents themselves have been lost in their originals for hundreds and thousands of years. So, how could it be that something like this could be so easy to preserve and to recite from cover to cover.

Anyway, one day the priest asked the Mohamed if he might accompany him to the mosque to see what it was like there. They came back talking about their experience there and we could not wait to ask the priest what it was like and what all types of ceremonies they performed. He said they didn't really 'do' anything. They just came and prayed and left. I said: "They left? Without any speeches or singing?" He said that was right.

A few more days went by and the Catholic priest asked Mohamed if he might join him again for a trip to the mosque which they did. But this time it was different. They did not come back for a very long time. It became dark and we worried that something might have happened to them. Finally they arrived and when they came in the door I immediately recognized Mohamed, but who was this alongside of him? Someone wearing a white robe and a white cap. Hold on a minute! It was the priest. I said to him: "Pete? -- Did you become a 'Moslem?' He said that he had entered into Islam that very day. THE PRIEST

BECAME A MUSLIM!! What next? (You'll see).
So, I went upstairs to think things over a bit and began to talk to my wife about the whole subject. She then told me that she too was going to enter into Islam, because she knew it was the truth. I was really shocked now. I went downstairs and woke up Mohamed and asked him to come outside with me for a discussion. We walked and talked that whole night through. By the time he was ready to pray Fajr (the morning prayer of the Muslims) I knew that the truth had come at last and now it was up to me to do my part. I went out back behind my father's house and found an old piece of plywood lying under an over-hang and right there I put my head down on the ground facing the direction that the Muslims pray five times a day.
Now then in that position, with my body stretched out on the plywood and my head on the ground, I asked: "O God. If you are there, guide me, guide me." And then after a while I raised up my head and I noticed something. No, I didn't see birds or angels coming out of the sky nor did I hear voices or music, nor did I see bright lights and flashes. What I did notice was a change inside of me. I was aware now more than ever before that it was time for me to stop lying and cheating and doing sneaky business deals. It was time that I really work at being an honest and upright man. I knew now what I had to do. So I went upstairs and took a shower with the distinct idea that I was 'washing' away the sinful old person that I had become over the years. And I was now coming into a new, fresh life. A life based on truth and proof.
Around 11:00 A.M. that morning, I stood before two witnesses, one the ex-priest, formerly known as Father Peter Jacob's, and the other Mohamed Abel Rehman and announced my 'shahadah' (open testimony to the Oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad, peace be upon him).
A few minutes later, my wife follow along and gave the same

testimony. But hers was in front of 3 witnesses (me being the third).

My father was a bit more reserved on the subject and waited a few more months before he made his shahadah (public testimony). But he did finally commit to Islam and began offering prayers right along with me and the other Muslims in the local masjid (mosque).

The children were taken out of the Christian school and placed in Muslim schools. And now ten years later, they are memorizing much of the Quran and the teachings of Islam.

My father's wife was the last of all to acknowledge that Jesus could not be a son of God and that he must have been a mighty prophet of God, but not God.

Now stop and think. A whole entire household of people from varying backgrounds and ethnic groups coming together in truth to learn how to know and worship the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. Think. A Catholic priest. A minister of music and preacher. An ordained minister and builder of Christian schools. And they all come into Islam! Only by His Mercy were we all guided to see the real truth of Islam without any blinders on their eyes any longer.

If I were to stop right here, I'm sure that you would have to admit that at least, this is an amazing story, right? After all, three religious leaders of three separate denominations all going into one very opposite belief at the same time and then soon after the rest of the household?

But that is not all. There is more! The same year, while I was in Grand Prairie, Texas (near Dallas) I met a Baptist seminary student from Tennessee named Joe, who also came to Islam after reading the Holy Quran while in BAPTIST SEMINARY COLLEGE!

There are others as well. I recall the case of the Catholic priest in a college town who talked about the good things in Islam so

much that I was forced to ask him why he didn't enter Islam. He replied: "What? And loose my job?" - His name is Father John and there is still hope for him yet.

More? Yes. The very next year I met a former Catholic priest who had been a missionary for 8 years in Africa. He learned about Islam while he was there and entered into Islam. He then changed his name to Omar and moved to Dallas Texas.

Any more? Again, yes. Two years later, while in San Antonio, Texas I was introduced to a former Arch Bishop of the Orthodox Church of Russia who learned about Islam and gave up his position to enter Islam.

And since my own entrance into Islam and becoming a chaplain to the Muslims throughout the country and around the world, I have encountered many more individuals who were leaders, teachers and scholars in other religions who learned about Islam and entered into it. They came from Hindus, Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, Greek and Russian Orthodox, Coptic Christians from Egypt, non-denominational churches and even scientists who had been atheists.

Why? Good question. May I suggest to the seeker of truth do the following NINE STEPS to purification of the mind:

1.) Clean their mind, their heart and their soul real good. 2.) Clear away all the prejudices and biases 3.) Read a good translation of the meaning of the Holy Quran in a language that they can understand best. 4.) Take some time. 5.) Read and reflect. 6.) Think and pray. 7.) And keep on asking the One who created you in the first place, to guide you to the truth. 8.) Keep this up for a few months. And be regular in it. 9.) Above all, do not let others who are poisoned in their thinking influence you while your are in this state of "rebirth of the soul."

The rest is between you and the Almighty Lord of the Universe. If you truly love Him, then He already Knows it and He will deal with each of us according to our hearts.

So, now you have the introduction to the story of my coming into Islam and becoming Muslim. There is more on the Internet about this story and there are more pictures there as well. Please take the time to visit it and then please take the time to email me and let us come together to share in all truths based on proofs for understanding our origins and our purpose and goals in this life and the Next Life.

May Allah guide you on your journey to all truth. Ameen. And May He open your heart and your mind to the reality of this world and the purpose of this life, ameen.

Peace to you and Guidance from Allah the One Almighty God, Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. Your friend,

Yusuf Estes

Visit the website of Chaplain Yusuf Estes
http://www.islamtomorrow.com/



2

Idris Tawfiq

Former Catholic Priest

UK

A former British Catholic Priest accepts Islam after reading the Quran and his interactions with Muslims.

"**Strongest** among men in enmity to the Believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the Believers wilt thou find those who say "We are Christians": because amongst these are men devoted to learning (priests), and men who have renounced the world (monks), and they are not arrogant. And then they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth. They pray: 'Our Lord! We believe, write us down among the witnesses.'
(Surat Al-Maida 82-83)"

This was what happened to the former British Catholic Priest Idris Tawfiq on reciting Islam's holy book, the Quran, to his students at a school in Britain. And this was one of the important steps in his journey of conversion to Islam.

During a recent lecture he gave at the British Council in Cairo, Tawfiq made clear that he has no regrets about his past and what he holds in regard to what Christians do and his life at the Vatican for five years.

"I enjoyed being a priest helping the people for some years. However, deep inside I was not happy and I felt that there was something not right. Fortunately, and it is God's will, some events and coincidences in my life led me to Islam," he told a packed hall at the British Council.

A second important coincidence for Tawfiq was his decision to quit his work at the Vatican, a step followed by making a trip to Egypt.

"I used to think of Egypt as a country of Pyramids, camels, sand and palm trees. I actually took a charter flight to Hurghada. Shocked to find it similar to some European beaches, I took the

first bus to Cairo where I spent the most wonderful week in my life.

This was my first introduction to Muslims and Islam. I noticed how Egyptians are such gentle, sweet people, but also very strong.

"Like all Britons, my knowledge about Muslims up to that time didn't exceed what I heard from the TV about suicide bombers and fighters, which gave the impression that Islam is a religion of troubles. However, getting into Cairo I discovered how beautiful this religion is. Very simple people selling goods on the street would abandon their trade and direct their face to Allah and pray the moment they heard the call to prayer from the mosque. They have a strong faith in the presence and will of Allah. They pray, fast, help the needy and dream to have a trip to Mecca with the hope of living in heaven in the hereafter," he said.

"On my return I resumed my old job of teaching religion. The only compulsory subject in British education is Religious Studies. I was teaching about Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and others. So everyday I had to read about these religions to be able to teach my lessons to the students, many of whom were Arab Muslim refugees. In other words, teaching about Islam taught me many things.

"Unlike many troublesome teenagers, these students set a good example of what a Muslim could be. They were polite and kind. So a friendship developed between us and they asked if they could use my classroom for prayers during the fasting month of Ramadan.

"Luckily, my room was the only one with a carpet. So I got accustomed to sitting at the back, watching them praying for a month. I sought to encourage them by fasting during Ramadan with them, even though I wasn't yet a Muslim.

"Once while reciting a translation of the holy Quran in class I reached the verse:

"And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messen-

ger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth."

To my surprise, I felt tears welling up in my eyes and I tried hard to hide it from the students."

A turning point in his life, however, came in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the US on September 11, 2001.

"The following day, I was taking the underground and noticed how terrified the people were. I was also afraid of the repetition of such acts in Britain. At the time, the Western people started fearing this religion they blamed for terrorism.

"However, my previous experience with Muslims took me to a different direction. I started wondering 'Why Islam? Why do we blame Islam as a religion for the action of terrorists who happened to be Muslims, when no-one accused Christianity of terrorism when some Christians have acted the same way?

"One day I headed to the biggest Mosque in London, to hear more about this religion. Getting into London Central Mosque, there was Yusuf Islam, the former pop singer, sitting in a circle talking to some people about Islam. After a while, I found myself asking him" 'What do you actually do to become a Muslim?"'

"He answered that a Muslim should believe in one God, pray five times a day and fast during Ramadan. I interrupted him saying that I believed all this and had even fasted during Ramadan. So he asked, 'What are you waiting for? What is holding you back?' I said, 'No, I don't intend to convert.'

"At that moment the call to prayer was made and everyone got ready and stood in lines to pray.

"I sat at the back, and I cried and cried. Then I said to myself, 'Who am I trying to fool?'

"After they ended their prayers, I headed to Yusuf Islam, asking him to teach me the words by which I announce my conversion.

"After explaining its meanings to me in English, I recited after

him in Arabic that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah," recounted Tawfiq, holding back his tears.

Thus his life has taken a different course. Living in Egypt, Tawfiq wrote a book about the tenets of Islam.

Explaining why he penned his book Gardens of Delight: a Simple Introduction to Islam, Tawfiq noted that everyone is saying that Islam is not a religion of terrorism and isn't a religion of hatred, but no-one tries to explain what it is.

"So I decided to write this book to give non-Muslims an idea about the basic principles of Islam. I tried to tell people how beautiful Islam is and that Islam has the most extraordinary treasures, the most important being Muslims' love for each other. The Prophet says 'Even a smile to your brother is a charity.'

Tawfiq told the Gazette that he is working on a book about the Prophet Muhammad [may the blessing and mercy of God be upon him] which he thinks will be different from the many books already written about him.

He thinks that the "best and fastest way" of acquainting the world with the true image of Islam is to set a good example in real life.

By Manal Abdulaziz (from The Egyptian Gazette)



3

Dr. GARY Miler

Former important Christian missionary

CANARA

A very important Christian missionary converted to Islam and became a major herald for Islam, he was a very active missionary and was very knowledgeable about the Bible. This man likes mathematics so much, that's why he likes logic.

A very important Christian missionary converted to Islam and became a major herald for Islam, he was a very active missionary and was very knowledgeable about the Bible. This man likes mathematics so much, that's why he likes logic. One day, he decided to read the Qur'an to try to find any mistakes that he might take advantage of while inviting Muslims to convert to Christianity. He expected the Qur'an to be an old book written 14 centuries ago, a book that talks about the desert and so on. He was amazed from what he found.

He discovered that this Book had what no other book in the world has. He expected to find some stories about the hard time that the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) had, like the death of his wife Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her) or the death of his sons and daughters. However, he did not find anything like that. And what made him even more confused is that he found a full "Sura" (chapter) in the Qur'an named "Mary" that contains a lot of respect to Mary (peace be upon her) which is not the case even in the books written by Christians nor in their Bibles. He did not find a Sura named after "Fatimah"(the prophet's daughter) nor "Aishah" (the Prophet's wife), may Allah (God) be pleased with both of them. He also found that the name of Jesus (Peace Be Upon Him) was mentioned in the Qur'an 25 times while the name of "Muhammad" (Peace Be Upon Him) was mentioned only 4 times, so he became more confused. He started reading the Qur'an more thoroughly hoping to find a mistake but he was shocked when he read a great verse which is verse number 82 in Surat Al-Nisa'a (Women) that says:

“Do they not consider the Qur'an (with care)? Had it been from

other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy".

Dr Miller says about this verse: "One of the well known scientific principles is the principle of finding mistakes or looking for mistakes in a theory until it's proved to be right (Falsification Test). What's amazing is that the Holy Qur'an asks Muslims and non-muslims to try to find mistakes in this book and it tells them that they will never find any". He also says about this verse: "No writer in the world has the courage to write a book and say that it's empty of mistakes, but the Qur'an, on the contrary, tells you that it has no mistakes and asks you to try to find one and you won't find any."

Another verse that Dr Miller reflected on for a long time is the verse number 30 in Surat "Al-Anbiya" (The Prophets):

" Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of Creation), before We clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?"

He says: "This verse is exactly the subject of the scientific research that won the Noble Prize in 1973 and was about the theory of the "Great Explosion". According to this theory, the universe was the result of a great explosion that lead to the formation of the universe with its skies and planets.

Dr Miller says: "Now we come to what's amazing about the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and what's pretended about the devils helping him, God says:

"No evil ones have brought down this (Revelation), it would neither suit them nor would they be able (to produce it). Indeed they have been removed far from even (a chance of) hearing it." The Holy Qur'an, Chapter 26, Verses 210-212.

"When thou does read the Qur'an, seek Allah's protection from Satan the Rejected One" The Holy Qur'an, Chapter 16, Verse 98.

You see? Can this be the devil's way to write a book? how can he write a book then tells you to ask God for protection from this devil before reading that book? Those are miraculous verses in this miraculous book! and has a logical answer to those who pretend that it's from the devil".

And among the stories that amazed Dr Miller is the story of the Prophet(PBUH) with Abu-Lahab. Dr Miller says: "This man (Abu Lahab) used to hate Islam so much that he would go after the Prophet wherever he goes to humiliate him. If he saw the prophet talking to strangers, he used to wait till he finishes and then ask them: What did Muhammad tell you? If he said it's white then it's in reality black and if he said it's night then it's day. He meant to falsify all what the prophet says and to make people suspicious about it. And 10 years before the death of Abu Lahab, a Sura was inspired to the prophet, named "Al-Masad". This sura tells that Abu Lahab will go to hell, in other words, it says that Abu Lahab will not convert to Islam. During 10 years, Abu Lahab could have said: "Muhammad is saying that I will not become a Muslim and that I will go to the hell fire, but I'm telling you now that I want to convert to Islam and become a Muslim. What do you think about Muhammad now? Is he saying the truth or no? Does his inspiration come from God?". But Abu Lahab did not do that at all although he was disobeying the prophet in all matters, but not in this one. In other words, it was as if the prophet(PBUH) was giving Abu Lahab a chance to prove him wrong! But he did not do that during 10 whole years! he did not convert to Islam and did not even pretend to be a Muslim!! Throughout 10 years, he had the chance to destroy Islam in one minute! But this did not happen because those are not the words of Muhammad (PBUH) but the words of God Who knows what's hidden and knows that Abu Lahab will not become a Muslim.

How can the prophet (PBUH) know that Abu Lahab will prove

what is said in that Sura if this was not inspiration from Allah? How can he be sure throughout 10 whole years that what he has (the Qur'an) is true if he did not know that it's inspiration from Allah?? For a person to take such a risky challenge, this has only one meaning: that this is inspiration from God.

"Perish the hands of the Father of Flame (Abu Lahab)! perish he! No profit to him from all his wealth, and all his gains! Burnt soon will he be in a Fire of blazing Flame! His wife shall carry the (crackling) wood; As fuel! A twisted rope of palm-leaf fibre round her (own) neck!" The Holy Qur'an, Chapter 111.

Dr Miller says about a verse that amazed him: One of the miracles in the Qur'an is challenging the future with things that humans cannot predict and to which the "Falsification Test" applies, this test consists of looking for mistakes until the thing that is being tested is proved to be right. For example, let's see what the Qur'an said about the relation between Muslims and Jews. Qur'an says that Jews are the major enemies for Muslims and this is true until now as the main enemy for Muslims are the Jews.

Dr Miller continues: This is considered a great challenge since the Jews have the chance to ruin Islam simply by treating Muslims in a friendly way for few years and then say: here we are treating you as friends and the Qur'an says that we are your enemies, the Qur'an must be wrong then! But this did not happen during 1400 years!! and it will never happen because those are the words of The One who knows the unseen (God) and not the words of humans.

Dr Miller continues: Can you see how the verse that talks about the enmity between Muslims and Jews constitutes a challenge to the human mind?

"Strongest among men in enmity to the Believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the Believers wilt thou find those who say, "We are Christians": because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who

have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant. And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth: they pray: "Our Lord! We believe; write us down among the witnesses"

The Holy Qur'an, Chapter 5, Verses 82-84.

This verse applies to Dr Miller as he was a Christian but when he knew the truth, he believed and converted to Islam and became a herald. May Allah support him.

Dr Miller says about the unique style of the Qur'an that he finds wonderful: No doubt there is something unique and amazing in Qur'an that is not present anywhere else, as the Qur'an gives you a specific information and tells you that you did not know this before. For example:

"This is part of the tidings of the things unseen, which We reveal unto thee (O Prophet!) by inspiration: thou was not with them when they cast lots with arrows, as to which of them should be charged with the care of Maryam: nor was thou with them when they disputed (the point)"

The Holy Qur'an, Chapter 3, Verse 44.

"Such are some of the stories of the Unseen, which We have revealed unto thee: before this, neither thou nor thy People knew them. So persevere patiently: for the End is for those who are righteous" The Holy Qur'an, Chapter 11, Verse 49.

"Such is one of the stories of what happened unseen, which We reveal by inspiration unto thee: nor was thou (present) with them when they concerted their plans together in the process of weaving their plots" The Holy Qur'an, Chapter 12, Verse 102.

Dr Miller continues: "No other holy book uses this style, all the other books consist of information that tells you where this information came from. For example, when the Holy Bible talks about the stories of the ancient nations, it tells you that a this King lived in a this place and a that leader fought in that battle,

and that a certain person had a number of kids and their names are. But this book (Bible) always tells you that if you want to know more, you can read a certain book since that information came from that book".

Dr Garry Miller continues: "This is in contrary to the Qur'an which gives you the information and tells you that it's new!! And what's amazing is that the people of Mecca at that time (time of inspiration of those verses) used to hear those verses and the challenge that the information in those verses was new and was not known by Muhammad (PBUH) nor by his people at that time, and despite that, they never said: We know this and it is not new, and they did not say: We know where Muhammad came from with those verses. This never happened, but what happened is that nobody dared to say that he was lying to them because those was really new information, not coming from the human mind but from Allah who knows the unseen in the past, the present and the future".



4

Ibrahim Khalil

Former Coptic priest

Egypt

Al-Haj Ibrahim Khalil Ahmad, formerly Ibrahim Khalil Philobus studied theology and got a high degree from Princeton University. He studied Islam to find gaps to attack it; instead he embraced Islam with his four children.

Al-Haj Ibrahim Khalil Ahmad, formerly Ibrahim Khalil Philobus, was an Egyptian Coptic priest who studied theology and got a high degree from Princeton University. He studied Islam to find gaps to attack it; instead he embraced Islam with his four children, one of whom is now a brilliant professor in Sorbonne University, Paris France. In an interesting way, he reveals himself saying: "I was born in Alexandria on the 13th of January 1919 and was sent to the American Mission schools until I got my secondary education certificate there. In 1942 I got my diploma from Asiut University and then I specialized in religious studies as a prelude to join the Faculty of Theology. It was no easy task to join the faculty, as no candidate could join it unless he got a special recommendation from the church, and also, after he should pass a number of difficult exams. I got a recommendation from Al-Attareen Church in Alexandria and another from the Church Assembly of Lower Egypt after passing many tests to know my qualifications to become a man of religion. Then I got a third recommendation from Snodus Church Assembly which included priests from Sudan and Egypt.

The Snodus sanctioned my entrance into the Faculty of Theology in 1944 as a boarding student. There I studied at the hands of American and Egyptian teachers until my graduation in 1948. I was supposed, he continued, to be appointed in Jerusalem had it not been for the war that broke out in Palestine that same year, so I was sent to Asna in Upper Egypt. That same year I registered for a thesis at the American University in Cairo. It

was about the missionary activities among Muslims. My acquaintance with Islam started in the Faculty of Theology where I studied Islam and all the methods through which we could shake the faith of Muslims and raise misconceptions in their understanding of their own religion.

In 1952 I got my M.A. from Princeton University in U.S.A. and was appointed as a teacher in the Faculty of Theology in Asiut. I used to teach Islam in the faculty as well as the faulty misconceptions spread by its enemies and the missionaries against it. During that period I decided to enlarge my study of Islam, so that I should not read the missionaries books on it only. I had so much faith in myself that I was confirmed to read the other point of view. Thus I began to read books written by Muslim authors. I also decided to read the Quran and understand its meanings. This was implied by my love of knowledge and moved by my desire to add more proofs against Islam. The result was, however, exactly the reverse. My position began to shake and I started to feel an internal strong struggle and I discovered the falsehood of everything I had studied and preached to the people. But I could not face myself bravely and tried instead to overcome this internal crisis and continue my work.

In 1954, Mr. Khalil added, I was sent to Aswan as secretary general of the German Swiss Mission. That was only my apparent position for my real mission was to preach against Islam in Upper Egypt especially among Muslims. A missionary conference was held at that time at Cataract Hotel in Aswan and I was given the floor to speak. That day I spoke too much, reiterating all the repeated misconceptions against Islam; and at the end of my speech, the internal crisis came to me again and I started to revise my position.

Continuing his talk about the said crisis, Mr. Khalil said, I began to ask myself: Why should I say and do all these things which I know for sure I am a liar, as this is not the truth? I took my leave

before the end of the conference and went out alone to my house. I was completely shaken. As I walked through Firyal public garden, I heard a verse of the Quran on the radio. It said:

"Say: It has been revealed to me that a company of Jinns listened (to the Quran). They said: We have really heard a wonderful recital! It gives guidance to the Right, and we have believed therein: We shall not join (in worship) any gods with our Lord." (Quran 72:1-2)

"And as for us, since we have listened to the Guidance, we have accepted it: and any one who believes in His Lord, has no fear of either a short (account) or of any injustice." (Quran 72:13)

I felt a deep comfort that night and when I returned home I spent the whole night all by myself in my library reading the Quran. My wife inquired from me about the reason of my sitting up all night and I pleaded from her to leave me alone. I stopped for a long time thinking and meditating on the verse; "Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, verily thou wouldst have seen it humble itself and cleave asunder for fear of Allah." (Quran 59:21) And the verse: "Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou find the Jews and the Pagans, and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, 'We are Christians': Because amongst these are men devoted to learning. And men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant. And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth: They pray: 'Our Lord! We believe, write us down among the witnesses. What cause can we have not to believe in Allah and the truth which has come to us, seeing that we long for our Lord to admit us to the company of the righteous?'" (Quran 5:82-84)

Mr. Khalil then quoted a third quotation from the Holy Quran which says: "Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures), in

the Taurat and in the Gospel; for he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them what is bad (and impure): He releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them. So it is those who believe in him, honor him, help him and follow the light which is sent down with him, it is they who will prosper." Say: "O men! I am sent unto you all, as the Messenger of Allah, to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: there is no god but He: It is He that giveth both life and death. So believe in Allah and His Messenger. The unlettered Prophet, who believeth in Allah and His Words: follow Him that (so) you may be guided." (Quran 7:157-158)

Now that same night, Mr. Khalil dramatically concluded: I took my final decision. In the morning I spoke with my wife from whom I have three sons and one daughter. But no sooner than she felt that I was inclined to embrace Islam than she cried and asked for help from the head of the mission. His name was Monsieur Shavits from Switzerland. He was a very cunning man. When he asked me about my true attitude, I told him frankly what I really wanted and then he said: Regard yourself out of job until we discover what has befallen you. Then I said: This is my resignation from my job. He tried to convince me to postpone it, but I insisted. So he made a rumor among the people that I became mad. Thus I suffered a very severe test and oppression until I left Aswan for good and returned to Cairo.

When he was asked about the circumstances to his conversion he replied: "In Cairo I was introduced to a respectable professor who helped me overcome my severe trial and this he did without knowing anything about my story. He treated me as a Muslim for I introduced myself to him as such although until then I did not embrace Islam officially. That was Dr. Muhammad Abdul Moneim Al Jamal the then undersecretary of treasury.

He was highly interested in Islamic studies and wanted to make a translation of the Holy Quran to be published in America. He asked me to help him because I was fluent in English since I had got my M.A. from an American University. He also knew that I was preparing a comparative study of the Quran, the Torah and the Bible. We cooperated in this comparative study and in the translation of the Quran.

When Dr. Jamal knew that I had resigned from my job in Aswan and that I was then unemployed, he helped me with a job in Standard Stationery Company in Cairo. So I was well established after a short while. I did not tell my wife about my intention to embrace Islam thus she thought that I had forgotten the whole affair and that it was nothing but a transitory crisis that no more existed. But I knew quite well that my official conversion to Islam needs long complicated measures and it was in fact a battle which I preferred to postpone for some time until I became well off and after I completed my comparative study."

Then Mr. Khalil continued, "In 1955 I did complete my study and my material and living affairs became well established. I resigned from the company and set up a training office for importing stationery and school articles. It was a successful business from which I gained much more money than I needed. Thus I decided to declare my official conversion to Islam.

On the 25th of December 1959, I sent a telegram to Dr. Thompson, head of the American Mission in Egypt informing him that I had embraced Islam. When I told my true story to Dr. Jamal he was completely astonished.

When I declared my conversion to Islam, new troubles began. Seven of my former colleagues in the mission had tried their best to persuade me to cancel my declaration, but I refused. They threatened to separate me from my wife and I said: She is free to do as she wishes. They threatened to kill me. But when they found me to be stubborn they left me alone and sent to me

an old friend of mine who was also a colleague of mine in the mission. He wept very much in front of me. So I recited before him the following verses from the Quran:

"And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth: They pray: 'Our Lord! We believe, write us down among the witnesses. What cause can we have not to believe in Allah and the truth which has come to us, seeing that we long for our Lord to admit us to the company of the righteous?'" (Quran 5:84)

I said to him, "You should have wept in humiliation to God on hearing the Quran and believe in the truth which you know but you refuse. He stood up and left me as he saw no use. My official conversion to Islam was in January 1960."

Mr. Khalil was then asked about the attitude of his wife and children and he answered: "My wife left me at that time and took with her all the furniture of our house. But all my children joined me and embraced Islam. The most enthusiastic among them was my eldest son Isaac who changed his name to Osman, then my second son Joseph and my son Samuel whose name is Jamal and daughter Majida who is now called Najwa. Osman is now a doctor of philosophy working as a professor in Sorbonne University in Paris teaching oriental studies and psychology. He also writes in «Le Monde» magazine. As in regards to my wife, she left the house for six years and agreed to come back in 1966 provided that she keeps her religion. I accepted this because in Islam there is no compulsion in religion. I said to her: I do not want you to become a Muslim for my sake but only after you are convinced. She feels now that she believes in Islam but she cannot declare this for fear of her family but we treat her as a Muslim woman and she fasts in Ramadan because all my children pray and fast. My daughter Najwa is a student in the Faculty of Commerce, Joseph is a doctor pharmeologist

and Jamal is an engineer."

"During this period, that is since 1961 until the present time I have been able to publish a number of books on Islam and the methods of the missionaries and the orientalist against it. I am now preparing a comparative study about women in the three Divine religions with the object of highlighting the status of women in Islam. In 1973 I performed Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and I am doing activities preaching Islam. I hold seminars in the universities and charitable societies. I received an invitation from Sudan in 1974 where I held many seminars. My time is fully used in the service of Islam."

Finally Mr. Khalil was asked about the salient features of Islam which have attracted his attention most. And he answered: "My faith in Islam has been brought about through reading the Holy Quran and the biography of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of God be upon him. I no longer believed in the misconceptions against Islam and I am especially attracted by the concept of unity of God, which is the most important feature of Islam. God is only One. Nothing is like Him. This belief makes me the servant of God only and of no one else. Oneness of God liberates man from servitude to any human being and that is true freedom."

I also like very much the rule of forgiveness in Islam and the direct relationship between God and His servants.

Say: "O my servants who have transgressed against their souls!, despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. Turn ye to your Lord (in repentance) and submit to Him before the Chastisement comes on you: After that ye shall not be helped." (Quran 39:53-54)



5
Anselm Tormeeda

Former Priest and Christian scholar

Spain

Anselm Tormeeda wrote a famous book called "The Gift to the Intelligent for Refuting the Arguments of the Christians". In the introduction to this work he relates his history.The book was a powerful blow to the structure of Christian belief because it was written by one of the greatest Christian scholars of the age.

Great numbers of Christians embraced Islam during and soon after the Islamic conquests after the prophets death. They were never compelled, rather it was a recognition of what they were already expecting. Anselm Tormeeda[1], a priest and Christian scholar, was one such person who's history is worth relating. He wrote a famous book called "The Gift to the Intelligent for Refuting the Arguments of the Christians"[2]. In the introduction[3] to this work he relates his history:

"Let it be known to all of you that my origin is from the city of Majorca, which is a great city on the sea between two mountains and divided by a small valley. It is a commercial city, with two wonderful harbors. Big merchant ships come and anchor in the harbor with different goods. The city is on the island which has the same name - Majorca, and most of its land is populated with fig and olive trees. My father was a well respected man in the city. I was his only son.

When I was six, he sent me to a priest who taught me to read the Gospel and logic, which I finished in six years. After that I left Majorca and traveled to the city of Larda, in the region of Castillion, which was the center of learning for Christians in that region. A thousand to a thousand and a half Christian students gathered there. All were under the administration of the priest who taught them. I studied the Gospel and its language for another four years. After that I left for Bologne in the region of Anbardia. Bologne is a very large city, it being the centre of learning for all the people of that region. Every year, more than two thousand students gather together from different places. They cover themselves with rough cloth which they call the "Hue of

God." All of them, whether the son of a workman or the son of a ruler, wear this wrap, in order to make the students distinct from the others.

Only the priest teaches, controls and directs them. I lived in the church with an aged priest. He was greatly respected by the people because of his knowledge and religiousness and asceticism, which distinguished him from the other Christian priests. Questions and requests for advice came from everywhere, from Kings and rulers, along with presents and gifts. They hoped that he would accept their presents and grant them his blessings. This priest taught me the principles of Christianity and its rulings. I became very close to him by serving and assisting him with his duties until I became one of his most trusted assistants, so that he trusted me with the keys of his domicile in the church and of the food and the drink stores. He kept for himself only the key of a small room were he used to sleep. I think, and God knows best, that he kept his treasure chest in there. I was a student and servant for a period of ten years, then he fell ill and failed to attend the meetings of his fellow priests.

During his absence, the priests discussed some religious matters, until they came to what was said by the Almighty God through his prophet Jesus in the Gospel: "After him will come a Prophet called Paraclete." They argued a great deal about this Prophet and as to who he was among the Prophets. Everyone gave his opinion according to his knowledge and understanding; and they ended without achieving any benefit in that issue. I went to my priest, and as usual he asked about what was discussed in the meeting that day. I mentioned to him the different opinions of priests about the name Paraclete, and how they finished the meeting without clarifying its meaning. He asked me: "What was your answer?" I gave my opinion which was taken from interpretation of a well known exegesis. He said that I was nearly correct like some priests, and the other priests were wrong.

"But the truth is different from all of that. This is because the interpretation of that noble name is known only to a small number of well versed scholars. And we posses only a little knowledge." I fell down and kissed his feet, saying: "Sir, you know that I traveled and came to you from a far distant country, I have served you now for more than ten years; and have attained knowledge beyond estimation, so please favor me and tell me the truth about this name." The priest then wept and said: "My son, by God, you are very much dear to me for serving me and devoting yourself to my care. Know the truth about this name, and there is a great benefit, but there is also a great danger. And I fear that when you know this truth, and the Christians discover that, you will be killed immediately." I said: "By God, by the Gospel and He who was sent with it, I shall never speak any word about what you will tell me, I shall keep it in my heart." He said: "My son, when you came here from your country, I asked you if it is near to the Muslims, and whether they made raids against you and if you made raids against them. This was to test your hatred for Islam. Know, my son, that Paraclete is the name of their Prophet Muhammad, to whom was revealed the fourth book as mentioned by Daniel. His way is the clear way which is mentioned in the Gospel." I said: "Then sir, what do you say about the religion of these Christians?" He said: "My son, if these Christians remained on the original religion of Jesus, then they would have been on God's religion, because the religion of Jesus and all the other Prophets is the true religion of God. But they changed it and became unbelievers." I asked him: "Then, sir, what is the salvation from this?" He said "Oh my son, embracing Islam." I asked him: "Will the one who embraces Islam be saved?" He answered: "Yes, in this world and the next." I said: "The prudent chooses for himself; if you know, sir the merit of Islam, then what keeps you from it?" He answered: "My son, the Almighty God did not expose me to the truth of Islam and the Prophet of

Islam until after I have become old and my body weakened. Yes, there is no excuse for us in this, on the contrary, the proof of God has been established against us. If God had guided me to this when I was your age, I would have left everything and adopted the religion of truth. Love of this world is the essence of every sin, and look how I am esteemed, glorified and honored by the Christians, and how I am living in affluence and comfort! In my case, if I show a slight inclination towards Islam they would kill me immediately. Suppose that I was saved from them and succeeded in escaping to the Muslims, they would say, do not count your Islam as a favor upon us, rather you have benefited yourself only by entering the religion of truth, the religion that will save you from the punishment of God! So I would live among them as a poor old man of more than ninety years, without knowing their language, and would die among them starving. I am, and all praise is due to God, on the religion of Christ and on that which he came with, and God knows that from me." So I asked him: "Do you advise me to go to the country of the Muslims and adopt their religion?" He said to me: "If you are wise and hope to save yourself, then race to that which will achieve this life and the hereafter. But my son, none is present with us concerning this matter; it is between you and me only. Exert yourself and keep it a secret. If it is disclosed and the people know about it they will kill you immediately. I will be of no benefit to you against them. Neither will it be of any use to you if you tell them what you heard from me concerning Islam, or that I encouraged you to be a Muslim, for I shall deny it. They trust my testimony against yours. So do not tell a word, whatever happens." I promised him not to do so.

He was satisfied and content with my promise. I began to prepare for my journey and bid him farewell. He prayed for me and gave me fifty golden dinars[4]. Then I took a ship to my city Majorca where I stayed with my parents for six months. Then I

traveled to Sicily and remained there five months, waiting for a ship bound for the land of the Muslims. Finally a ship arrived bound for Tunis. We departed before sunset and reached the port of Tunis at noon on the second day. When I got off the ship, Christian scholars who heard of my arrival came to greet me and I stayed with them for four months in ease and comfort. After that, I asked them if there was a translator. The Sultan in those days was Abu al-Abbas Ahmed. They said there was a virtuous man, the Sultan's physician, who was one of his closest advisors. His name was Yusuf al-Tabeeb. I was greatly pleased to here this, and asked where he lived. They took me there to meet him separately. I told him about my story and the reason of my coming there; which was to embrace Islam. He was immensely pleased because this matter would be completed by his help. We rode to the Sultan's Palace. He met the Sultan and told him about my story and asked his permission for me to meet him.

The Sultan accepted, and I presented myself before him. The first question the Sultan asked was about my age. I told him that I was thirty-five years old. He then asked about my learning and the sciences which I had studied. After I told him he said. "Your arrival is the arrival of goodness. Be a Muslim with God's blessings." I then said to the doctor, "Tell the honorable Sultan that it always happens that when anyone changes his religion his people defame him and speak evil of him. So, I wish if he kindly sends to bring the Christian priests and merchants of this city to ask them about me and hear what they have to say. Then by God's will, I shall accept Islam." He said to me through the translator, "You have asked what Abdullah bin Salaam asked from the Prophet when he – Abdullah came to announce his Islam." He then sent for the priests and some Christian merchants and let me sit in an adjoining room unseen by them. "What do you say

about this new priest who arrived by ship?" he asked. They said: "He is a great scholar in our religion. Our bishops say he is the most learned and no one is superior to him in our religious knowledge." After hearing what the Christian said, the Sultan sent for me, and I presented myself before them. I declared the two testimonies that there is no one worthy of worship except God and that Muhammad, may the blessing and mercy of God be upon him, is His Messenger, and when the Christians heard this they crossed themselves and said: "Nothing incited him to do that except his desire to marry, as priests in our religion can not marry." Then they left in distress and grief.

The Sultan appointed for me a quarter of a dinar every day from the treasury and let me marry the daughter of Al-Hajj Muhammed al-Saffar. When I decided to consummate the marriage, he gave me a hundred golden dinars and an excellent suit of clothes. I then consummated the marriage and God blessed me with a child to whom I gave the name Muhammed as a blessing from the name of the Prophet."[5]

Footnotes:

[1] After embracing Islam, he was known as Abu Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Tarjuman. He was called Al-Tarjuman (The Translator), because in less than five months after his conversion, the Sultan appointed him general of the Marine Administration where he learned the Arabic language and became a skillful translator in discussions between Muslims and Christians. After only one year, he excelled in the Arabic language and was appointed as the head of Translation Affairs. He was well known among the common people, who gave him some pleasant nicknames; the most popular was Sidi Tohfah, which means "My Master Gift", referring to his famous book.

[2] Tuhfat al-arib fi al-radd 'ala Ahl al-Salib in Arabic. The book was a powerful blow to the structure of Christian belief

because it was written by one of the greatest Christian scholars of the age.

[3] Following the introduction, he wrote about some events concerning the Hafsah State. He followed with nine chapters including one demonstrating that the four gospels were not written by the disciples of Jesus to whom they are usually attributed. He also discussed other topics including Baptism, Trinity, Original Sin, The Lord's Supper, The Indulgence, The Law of Faith. He refuted all of these doctrines based upon the texts of the Gospels and logical reasoning. He proved also the human nature of Christ and disproved his alleged Divine nature. He then exposed the contradictions in the interpolated texts of the Bible. He also discussed matters which Christians criticized the Muslims about, such as the permissibility of marriage for religious scholars and pious men, circumcision and physical enjoyment in Paradise. He concluded his book by proving the truth of the Prophethood of Muhammad using texts from the Bible.

[4] Coins of currency

[5] Extracted from Material on the Authenticity of the Quran: Proofs that it is a Revelation from Almighty God by Abdur-Raheem Greene



6

Khadijah 'Sue' Watson

Former Pastor, Church Planter and Missionary

U.S.A.

She is an American from California. Khadija Watson, ex-professor of theology." She has a BA and an MA in theology. She was an ordained, licensed minister, a Christian missionary who spent seven years preaching in the Philippines.

"**What** happened to you?" This was usually the first reaction I encountered when my former classmates, friends and co-pastors saw me after having embraced Islam. I suppose I couldn't blame them, I was a highly unlikely the person to change religions. Formerly, I was a professor, pastor, church planter and missionary. If anyone was a radical fundamentalist it was I.

I had just graduated with my Master's Degree of Divinity from an elite seminary five months before. It was after that time I met a lady who had worked in Saudi Arabia and had embraced Islam. Of course I asked her about the treatment of women in Islam. I was shocked at her answer, it wasn't what I expected so I proceeded to ask other questions relating to Allah and Muhammad (pbuh). She informed me that she would take me to the Islamic Center where they would be better able to answer my questions.

Being prayed up, meaning-asking Jesus for protection against demon spirits seeing that what we had been taught about Islam is that it is Demonic and Satanic religion. Having taught Evangelism I was quite shocked at their approach, it wa s direct and straightforward. No intimidation, no harassment, no psychological manipulation, no subliminal influence! None of this, "let's have a Qur'aanic study in your house", like a counter part of the Bible study. I couldn't believe it! They gave me some books and told me if I had some questions they were available to answer them in the office. That night I read all of the books they gave. It was the first time I had ever read a book about Islam written by a Muslim, we had studied and read books about Islam only written by Christians. The next day I spent three hours at the office asking questions. This went on everyday for

a week, by which time I had read twelve books and knew why Muslims are the hardest people in the world to convert to Christianity. Why? Because there is nothing to offer them!! (In Islam) There is a relationship with Allah, forgiveness of sins, salvation and promise of Eternal Life.

Naturally, my first question centered on the deity of Allah. Who is this Allah that the Muslims worship? We had been taught as Christians that this is another god, a false god. When in fact He is the Omniscient-All Knowing, Omnipotent-All Powerful, and Omnipresent-All Present God. The One and Only without co-partners or co-equal. It is interesting to note that there were bishops during the first three hundred years of the Church that were teaching as the Muslim beli eves that Jesus (pbuh) was a prophet and teacher!! It was only after the conversion of Emperor Constantine that he was the one to call and introduce the doctrine of the Trinity. He a convert to Christianity who knew nothing of this religion introduced a paganistic concept that goes back to Babylonian times. Because the space does not permit me to go into detail about the subject insha'Allah, another time. Only I must point out that the word TRINITY is not found in the Bible in any of its many translation nor is it found in the original Greek or Hebrew languages!

My other important question centered on Muhammad (pbuh). Who is this Muhammad? I found out that Muslims do not pray to him like the Christians pray to Jesus. He is not an intermediary and in fact it is forbidden to pray to him. We ask blessing upon him at the end of our prayer but likewise we ask blessings on Abraham. He is a Prophet and a Messenger, the final and last Prophet. In fact, until now, one thousand four hundred and eighteen years (1,418) later there has been no prophet after him. His message is for All Mankind as opposed to the message of Jesus or Moses (peace be upon them both) which was sent to the Jews. "Hear O Israel" But the message is the same message of

Allah. "The Lord Your God is One God and you shall have no other gods before Me."(Mark 12:29).

Because prayer was a very important part of my Christian life I was both interested and curious to know what the Muslims were praying. As Christians we were as ignorant on this aspect of Muslim belief as on the other aspects. We thought and were taught, that the Muslims were bowing down to the Ka'bah (in Mecca), that that was there god and center point of this false deity. Again, I was shocked to learn that the manner of prayer is prescribed by God, Himself. The words of the prayer are one of praise and exaltation. The approach to prayer (ablution or washing) in cleanliness is under the direction of Allah. He is a Holy God and it is not for us to approach Him in an arbitrary manner but only reasonable that He should tell us how we should approach Him.

At the end of that week after having spent eight (8) years of formal theological studies I knew cognitively (head knowledge) that Islam was true. But I did not embrace Islam at that time because I did not believe it in my heart. I continued to pray, to read the Bible, to attend lectures at the Islamic Center. I was in earnest asking and seeking God's direction. It is not easy to change your religion. I did not want to loose my salvation if there was salvation to loose. I continued to be shocked and amazed at what I was learning because it was not what I was taught that Islam believed. In my Master's level, the professor I had was respected as an authority on Islam yet his teaching and that of Christianity in general is full of Misunderstanding. He and many Christians like him are sincere but they are sincerely wrong.

Two months later after having once again prayed seeking God's direction, I felt something drop into my being! I sat up, and it was the first time I was to use the name of Allah, and I said, "Allah, I believe you are the One and Only True God." There was peace that descended upon me and from that day four years

ago until now I have never regretted embracing Islam. This decision did not come without trial. I was fired from my job as I was teaching in two Bible Colleges at that time, ostracized by my former classmates, professors and co-pastors, disowned by my husband's family, misunderstood by my adult children and made a suspicion by my own government. Without the faith that enables man to stand up to Satanic forces I would not have been able to withstand all of this. I am ever so grateful to Allah that I am a Muslim and may I live and die a Muslim.

"Truly, my prayer, my service of sacrifice, my life and my death are all for God the Cherisher of the Worlds. No partner has He, this I am commanded. And I am the first of those who bow to Allah in Islam."

(Holy Qur'aan 6:162-163)

Khadijah Watson

Khadija's 18-year-old son, however, became a Muslim. "Something I could not believe. He was into music and dating and was not ready for any kind of religion. I used to leave books for him to read, but I found them untouched. But I prayed a lot for him - and all my children - to become Muslim. Later, when he converted to Islam, he confessed that he had read all the books and kept me from knowing. He was the one who went to Makkah first. When he came back, he told me excitedly, 'Mom, you will love Saudi Arabia. All the women dress like you!"

Sister Khadijah Watson is presently working as a teacher for women in one of the Da'wah (Invitation) Centers in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia



7

George Anthony

Former Catholic priest

Sri Lanka

Fr. Antony was a Catholic priest in Sri Lanka. His tale of becoming a true believer and adopting a name Abdulrahman for him is quite interesting. Being a Christian priest he was well versed with the teachings of the Bible.

Fr. Antony was a Catholic priest in Sri Lanka. His tale of becoming a true believer and adopting a name Adulrahman for him is quite interesting. Being a Christian priest he was well versed with the teachings of the Bible. He quotes the Bible frequently as he sits to narrate his journey to Islam. While reading the Bible he found many contradictions in it. He goes on quoting verses from the Bible in Sinhalese language and points out the ambiguity.

"He quotes Esaiah 9:12 which reads like this." And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith; I am not learned." This verse is a prophecy towards prophet Mohammed (pbuh), because Mohammad (pubh) was an unlettered prophet and when he was an unlettered prophet and when he was asked by Angel Gabrielto read out the first divine revelation upon him he said, "I am not learned" Contrary to the Christian belief that Jesus is God, Acts 2:22 of the Holy Bible considers Jesus as a man. It says, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words, jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourself also know."

Christianity and the other religions, do not define the prophehood according to him. Nor does Bhudda and is silent about the other prophets. Contrary to this it is compulsory in Islam to believe in all the formaer Prophets and to revere them. According to Abdulrahman this belief is quite convincing and appealing to every body.

Abdulrahman says that there is no reason for the restriction that a Roman Catholic priest cannot marry, when the priests of many

other sects of Christianity can marry. Abdulrahman was pondering over the confusions of Christian belief. Meanwhile he got an Audio Cassette of a converted Christian priest Sri Lanka Shareef D Alwis. Cassettes of Ahmad Deedat also attracted him. His continuous efforts to find the truth finally resulted in reversion to Islam. Fr. George Antony

Abdulrahman, hails from the Rathnapura village of Sri Lanka. He was rendering his services as a priest in Katumayaka church. He has ten years of training of the priesthood to his credit.

He wrote letters to his mother introducing Islam. After months of studies she followed the path of her son and embraced Islam. Abdurahman's only sister is working in Greece. His father and sister still remained Christians.

Abdurahman gave up his highly respected career as a priest for the sake of truth. He happily sacrificed all material gains for the spiritual triumph. He is now working as a trainee in Islam Presentation Committee of Kuwait.



8
Jason Cruz

Ex-Priest

U.S.A.

I began to read about Islam independently and was startled by how touched I was with what I was reading. Allah had me now but I did not yet know it. I went to the Tempe mosque and was to meet a wonderful teacher in the form of Ahmad Al Akoum.

Alhumdulillah (Thank God), I have been blessed by Allah with the gift of Islam since 2006. When I was asked to write about the path that I took and how Allah has blessed me, I was hesitant. I have seen others get caught up with personal fame by telling how they came to Islam and I knew that I didn't want to have the same challenge.

I ask you then to take this story as the work of Allah and focus on his mercy and greatness rather than my story in particular, insha Allah. No one comes to Islam without the mercy of Allah and it is his work not that of the revert that truly matters.

I was born to a nominally Roman Catholic family in Upstate New York. I had a Roman Catholic mother and a Presbyterian father who converted to Catholicism in order to get married.

We attended church on Sundays and I went through catechism, first communion, and eventually confirmation within the Roman Catholic Church. When I was young I began to feel a call from Allah. This call I interpreted as a call to the Roman Catholic priesthood and told my mother as such. She, pleased with this, took me to meet the priest at our local parish.

Fortunately or unfortunately, this particular priest was not happy with his vocation and advised me to stay away from the priesthood. This upset me and even today, I do not know how things would have been different if his response had been more positive.

From that earlier brush with Allah's call, and out of my own foolishness and in my teen years, I went the other way. My family broke up at an early age when I was seven and I suffered from the loss of my father who was not present after the divorce.

Starting at the young age of 15, I began to be more interested in nightclubs and parties than the Lord of the Universe. I dreamed of becoming a lawyer, then politician with a penthouse in Manhattan so I could participate in a party lifestyle with style.

After I graduated with honors, from my high school, I went to college briefly. But my own twisted focus led me to drop from college and move to Arizona (where I continue to live until now) instead of getting my degree.

This is something that I regret to this day. Once in Arizona, my situation went from bad to worse. I fell in with a much worse crowd than I had at home and began to use drugs. Due to my lack of education, I worked low end jobs and continued to spend my time in drugs, promiscuity, and nightclubs.

During this time, I had my first encounter with a Muslim. He was a kind man who was attending a local college as a foreign student. He was dating one of my friends and often accompanied us to nightclubs and other parties that we attended. I did not discuss Islam with him but did question him about his culture which he shared freely. Islam did not come up. Again I wonder how things would have been different had he been a practicing Muslim.

My bad lifestyle continued for some years and I won't belabor it with details. I had lots of trauma, people that I knew died, I was stabbed and otherwise wounded but this is not a tale of the dangers of drugs.

I only mention it to state that no matter where you are, Allah can bring you back from it insha Allah. I will fast forward to when I became clean from drugs. Part of the process of getting off of drugs and narcotics is to establish a relationship with a "higher power".

For most this is God and or other expressions of divinity. I had long before lost my connection to Allah so I went on a search for my higher power. Sadly, I did not find the truth at first. In-

stead I went to Hinduism, which appealed to me because of its explanation of why suffering had happened to me.

I went all into it, even changing my name to a Hindu name. It was enough to keep me off of drugs and move my life in a more positive direction, for which I am grateful. Eventually, though I began to again feel the tug from Allah. This began to show me that for me, Hinduism was not the true way.

Allah continued to needle me until I left Hinduism and I began to go back to Christianity. I approached the Roman Catholic Church to become a priest, as this is what I felt Allah was calling me for, and they offered me an education and a post in a monastery in New Mexico. By this time my family (mother, brother and sister) had moved to Arizona and I had close relationships with many friends.

Needless to say I was not yet ready. Instead I found an independent catholic church that I could study through their seminary program from home and become ordained and assigned where I was already living. This independent Catholic Church also appealed to my liberal ideals that I had developed through my years living rough. I attended their seminary program and in 2005 I was ordained a priest.

My first ministry in my new role was interfaith relations. My assignment was to visit and learn about the different faith traditions in the Phoenix Metro area and share with them an interfaith message of peace and understanding from my church.

Most Christian traditions I already had studied and knew. I brushed up on Judaism and other Far East religions. I was what is known as a worker-priest, which means I had a job at the same time as I was doing my ministry. I had changed from working in corporate America to working in a behavioral health agency. My post was down the street from a Masjid. I thought that this was my chance to learn about Islam for my interfaith relations. I went to the mosque and met some very nice brothers who di-

rected me to the mosque in Tempe, Arizona.

I also began to read about Islam independently and was startled by how touched I was with what I was reading. Allah had me now but I did not yet know it. I went to the Tempe mosque and was to meet a wonderful teacher in the form of Ahmad Al Akoum. Br. Al Akoum, who is the regional director of Muslim American Society, had an introduction to Islam class open for people of all faiths that I began to attend. While attending this class, I began to see that Islam was the truth. It was only a short time later that I gave Shahadah at the Tempe mosquewith the Sheikh Ahmed Shqeirat. Both Br. Al Akoum and Sheikh Shqeirat are great men and without them I would not have been as comfortable coming into Islam. I resigned from the church and have been Muslim ever since, Alhumdulillah.

My life has changed dramatically for the better since embracing Islam. At first my family was saddened that I left the priesthood and didn't understand, even feared, Islam. But since my way of interacting with them, based on my increased happiness and my striving to adhere to Quran and Sunnah, has changed—they have seen that it is a good thing.

Br. Al Akoum knew that the first year is always toughest for the revert. To lessen the stress of it, he made sure that I was included in multiple community activities and met lots of good practicing brothers. It is only through contact with other Muslims that a revert can be successful.

Left on his or her own, it can be too daunting and their faith may slip too far, so if you know a revert, please visit them at least once every three days. I have advanced further in my job because of my new base as a Muslim. I became a manager of a program that seeks to prevent alcohol and drug abuse, HIV, and Hepatitis for at risk populations.

I have become a volunteer in not only Muslim American Society but also the Muslim Youth Centre of Arizona and other

Muslim causes. I have been recently nominated to the board of the Tempe mosque where I first took shahadah. Alhumdulillah it has also clarified who are my true friends versus who were not. I have less non Muslim friends now as I cannot participate in the activities that they choose to do for fun but I have developed valuable friendships with Muslim brothers that are better than anything I have had in the past. Insha Allah, if Allah chooses, I would like to go and study Fiqh to further the cause of Islam and benefit the Ummah that I love. All of this was through the grace of Allah and only the mistakes are mine.



9

Martin John Mwaipopo

Former Lutheran Archbishop

Tanzania

It was December 23, 1986, when Arch Bishop Martin John Mwaipopo, announced to his congregation that he was leaving Christianity for Islam.

(**It** was December 23, 1986, two days away from Christmas, when Arch Bishop Martin John Mwaipopo, announced to his congregation that he was leaving Christianity for Islam. The congregation was paralysed with shock on hearing the news, so much so, that his administrator got up from his seat, closed the door and windows, and declared to the church members that the Bishop's mind had become unhinged, that is, he had gone mad. How could he not think and say so, when only a few minutes earlier, the man had taken out his music instruments and sang so movingly for the church members? Little did they know that inside the Bishop's heart lay a decision that would blow their minds, and that the entertainment was only a farewell party. But the congregant's reaction was equally shocking! They called the police to take the "mad" man away. He was kept in the cells until midnight when Sheikh Ahmed Sheik, the man who initiated him into Islam came to bail him out. That incident was only a mild beginning of shocks in store for him. Al Qalam reporter, Simphiwe Sesanti, spoke to the Tanzanian born former Lutheran Arch Bishop Martin John Mwaipopo, who on embracing Islam came to be known as Al Hajj Abu Bakr John Mwaipopo)

Credit must go to the Zimbabwean brother, Sufyan Sabelo, for provoking this writer's curiosity, after listening to Mwaipopo's talk at the Wyebank Islamic Centre, Durban. Sufyan is not sensationalist, but that night he must have heard something - he just could not stop talking about the man! Who would not be hooked after hearing that an Arch Bishop, who had not only obtained a BA and Masters degree, but a doctorate as well, in Divinity, had later turned to Islam? And since foreign qualifications matter so

much to you, a man who had obtained a diploma in Church Administration in England and the latter degrees in Berlin, Germany! A man, who, before becoming a Muslim, had been the World Council of Churches' General Secretary for Eastern Africa - covering Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, and parts of Ethiopia and Somalia. In the Council of Churches, he rubbed shoulders with the present chairman of the South African Human Rights Commission . Barney Pityana and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission 's chairman, Bishop Desmond Tutu.

It is a story of a man who was born 61 years ago, on February 22 in Bukabo, an area that shares its borders with Uganda. Two years, after his birth, his family had him baptised, and five years later, watched him with pride being an alter boy . Seeing him assisting the church minister, preparing the "body and blood" of Christ , filled the Mwaipopos with pride, and filled Mwaipopo Senior with ideas for his son's future.

"When I was in a boarding school, later , my father wrote to me, stating he wanted me to become a priest. In each and every letter he wrote this" , recalls Abu Bakr. But he had his own ideas about his life, which was joining the police force. But at the age of 25, Mwaipopo gave in to his father's will. Unlike in Europe where children can do as they will after age 21 , in Africa , children are taught to honour their parent's will above their own. "My , son , before I close my eyes (die), I would be glad if you could become a priest", that's how father told son, and that's how the son was moved, a move that saw him going to England in 1964, to do a diploma in Church Administration, and a year later to Germany to do a B.A degree. On returning , a year later, he was made acting Bishop. Later, he went back to do Masters. " All this time, I was just doing things, without questioning . It was when he began to do his doctorate , that he started questioning things. "I started wondering … there is Christianity, Islam, Judaism Buddhism each different religions claiming to the

true religion. What is the truth? I wanted the truth" , says Mwaipopo. So began his search , until he reduced it to the "major" four religions. He got himself a copy of the Qur'an, and guess what?

" When I opened the Qur'an , the first verses I came across were, ' Say : He is Allah , The One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begeteteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him? (Surah Ikhlas)' ", he recalls. That was when the seeds of Islam, unknown to him, were first sown. It was then that he discovered that the Qur'an was the only scripture book that had been untampered with, by human beings since its revelation . "And in concluding my doctoral thesis I said so. I didn't care whether they give me my doctorate or not - that was the truth, and I was looking for the truth."

While in that state of mind he called his "beloved" Professor Van Burger.

"I closed the door, looked him in the eye and asked him 'of all religions in the world, which is true', I asked.

'Islam', he responded.

'Why then are you not a Muslim?', I asked again.

He said to me "'One, I hate Arabs, and two, do you see all this luxuries that I have? Do you think that I would give it all up for Islam?'. When I thought about his answer, I thought about my own situation, too", recalls Mwaipopo. His mission, his cars - all these appeared in his imagination. No, he could not embrace Islam, and for one good year, he put it off his mind. But then dreams haunted him, the verses of the Quran kept on appearing, people clad in white kept on coming, "especially on Fridays", until he could take it no more.

So, on December 22, he officially embraced Islam. These dreams that guided him - were they not due to the "superstitious" nature of the Africans? "No, I don't believe that all dreams are bad. There are those that guide you in the right direction and

those which don't, and these ones, in particular, guided me in the right direction, to Islam", he tells us.

Consequently, the church stripped him of his house and his car. His wife could not take it, she packed her clothes, took her children and left, despite Mwaipopo's assurances that she was not obliged to become a Muslim. When he went to his parents, they, too, had heard the story. "My father told me to denounce Islam and my mother said she did not "want to hear any nonsense from me", remember Mwaipopo. He was on his own! Asked how he now feels towards his parents, he says that he has forgiven them, in fact found time to reconcile with his father before he departed to the world yonder.

"They were just old people who did not know. They could not even read the Bible…all they knew was what they had heard the priest reading", he states. After asking to stay for one night, the following day, he began his journey to where his family had originally come from, Kyela, near the borders between Tanzania and Malawi. His parents had settled in Kilosa, Morogoro. During his journey, he was stranded in Busale, by one family that was selling home brewed beer. It was there that he met his future wife, a Catholic Nun, by the name of Sister Gertrude Kibweya, now known as Sister Zainab. It was with her that he travelled to Kyela, where the old man, who had given him shelter the previous night had told him that that's where he would find other Muslims. But before that, in the morning of that day he had made the call to prayer (azaan), something which made the villagers come out, asking his host why he was keeping a "mad" man. "It was the Nun who explained that I was not mad but a Muslim", he says. It was the same Nun who later helped Mwaipopo pay his medical fees at the Anglican Mission Hospital, when he had become terribly sick, thanks to the conversation he had had with her. The story goes that he had asked her why she was wearing a rosary, to which she responded that it

was because Christ was hanged on it. "But, say, someone had killed your father with a gun, would you go around carrying a gun on your chest?" Mmmhhh. That set the Nun thinking, her mind "challenged", and when the former Bishop proposed marriage to the Nun later, the answer was "yes". Secretly, they married, and four weeks later, she wrote a letter to her authorities, informing them of her leave. When the old man who had given him shelter, (the Nun's uncle) heard about the marriage, when they arrived at his house, they were advised to leave the house, because "the old man was loading his gun", and the Nun's father was enraged, "wild like a lion". From the Bishop's mansion, Mwaipopo went to live in a self built mud house. From earning a living as the World Council of Churches' General Secretary for Eastern Africa, he began earning a living as a wood cutter and tilling some people's lands. When not doing that he was preaching Islam publicly. This led to a series of short term imprisonments for preaching blasphemy against Christianity.

While on hajj in 1988, tragedy struck. His house was bombed, and consequently, his infant triplets were killed. "A bishop, whose mother and my own mother were children of the same father, was involved in the plot', recalls Mwaipopo. He says instead of demoralising him, it did the opposite, as the numbers of people embracing Islam, increased, this including his father in law.

In 1992, he was arrested for 10 months, along with 70 followers, charged with treason. This was after some pork shops, against which he had spoken, were bombed. He did speak against them, he admits, saying that constitutionally, since 1913, there was a law against bars, clubs and pork shops in Dar es Salaam, Tanga, Mafia, Lindi and Kigoma. Fortunately for him, he was acquitted, and immediately thereafter, he fled to Zambia, exile, after he was advised that there was a plot to kill him.

He says that that very day he was released, police came to re-arrest him. And guess what? "The women said no ways! They

said that they would resist my arrest physically against the police. It was also the women who helped me cross the borders unnoticed. They clothed me in the women's fashion!", according to Mwaipopo. And that is one of the reasons that make him admire women.

"Women must be given a high place, they must be given good education in Islam. Otherwise how would she understand why a man marries more than one wife…It was my wife, Zainab, who proposed that I should marry my second wife, Shela, (her friend), when she had to go for Islamic studies abroad", it's the bishop who says so. Yah? To the Muslims, Al Hajj Abu Bakr Mwaipopo's message is, "There is war against Islam…Flood the world with literature. Right now, Muslims are made to feel ashamed to be regarded as fundamentalists. Muslims must stop their individualistic tendencies, they must be collective. You have do defend your neighbour if you want to be safe", he states, also urging Muslims to be courageous, citing the Islamic Propagation Centre International's Ahmed Deedat. "That man is not learned, but look at the way he has propagated Islam".



10

Muslima

The Former Catholic Missionary

Burundi

The spiritual climate of West Africa is ripe for Islam and there are many projects which need doing. This is what I have been trained to do and so my path is straight and narrow for me now.

The nuns looked so clean and smart in their starched white habits. They looked like the saints in the pictures that hung on the wall of every classroom, that I dreamt of the day I could be like them. I was among two other girls who get excellent grades at the end of the school year and we were asked if we would like to study religion. They thought we were pious for our ages because we liked to spend endless hours inside the church. They didn't realize that the inside of the church was dim and cold and a welcome relief from the hot African sun.

I couldn't wait to tell my father, who surprisingly said, 'absolutely not!' He would not like that kind of life for one of his girls; without husband and children. He enrolled me in another school, which had previously only admitted boys. Besides myself, there was another girl in the Roman Catholic Mission school in Burundi. The years I spent at this school made me quite tough as I competed only against boys. The nuns used excessive force in disciplinary matters. The fact that we were all adolescents might have had a good deal to do with it. Still, it didn't seem a very Christian thing to do.

I was interested in religion and excelled in the study of languages and accepted a full scholarship to a university in Cameroon after graduating from high school. Again, as the only female, I enrolled in the College of Theology. I wasn't sure where I would go with it, but after a short while, the administration applied for a scholarship in the same College of Theology, but in Belgium. There I would learn how to be a Pastor in the Roman Catholic Church.My language ability aided me quite a bit and my mastery of some of the African dialects attracted them as a good candidate for missionary work.

As the years went by, I began to see through the layers of theology and found the superficiality of their teachings. I was not alone in seeing the many contradictions in the New and Old Testaments. To learn that the 'Trinity' is mentioned only once in the New Testament was a surprise but when I learned it had been fully established at the Council of Nicea and that it was not part of what Jesus taught, something in my mind clicked.

We were shown certain books called the Gnostic Books, which we were told were hidden teachings, I understood that the church was being deceitful and this was disturbing. How could I believe that this was, as they said, the word of God from A to Z. "The People of the Book know this as they know their own sons; but some of them conceal the Truth which they themselves know. The Truth is from thy Lord, so be not in doubt." (Qur'an 2:146-147)

Still I pursued my studies in an effort to be able to help myself and my people some day. "As for those who divide their religion and break up into sects, thou has no part in them in the least: their affair is with Allah: He will in the end tell them the truth of all that they did." (Qur'an 6:159)

After graduation from University, I took a position in Nairobi, Kenya. The Church was very anxious to have an African in a position such as this. They had many programmes for women and I was a coordinator for these programmes under the auspices of the World Council of Churches. I handled different aspects of exhibitions, women's projects, donors, workshops and conferences.I was sent to the regional office in Togo because they are mainly French-speaking which I spoke fluently and the type of projects I knew how to handle were being implemented there. I began to search for the spiritual force that was missing in my life and in Togo I searched through all the practiced religions. When one looks for truth there are many things thrown in one's path.

This part of Africa has many people who practice witchcraft and

who claim to have knowledge of the unseen and it was obvious they were just taking people's money. There is no one with knowledge of the unseen except God. I had been facing much mediocrity from the Church and at the same time I had Muslim friends who were very comfortable in their knowledge of God, who prayed five times daily and who had many virtues. They believed in what they said, in contrast to the Church where you repeat what you have been taught without believing in it.

I had never been taught anything about Islam except a superficial introduction so I did a lot of reading about the religion.

I cannot say that to convert to Islam was easy; it was very difficult. But when one is searching for the truth there is no way to deny it. The decision was also difficult for economic reasons as I had one of the highest paying professions with many perks. I resigned from my position citing my conversion as my reason and immediately lost my job and salary, housing and medical benefits. I became destitute in one day!

My family does not like my hijab but they admire the moral aspects of Islam. I helped to raise my brothers and sisters and they are much younger than I, and now to see how much they hate me is almost unbearable. They felt the economic hardship immediately as I did, and cannot understand why I would do such a thing. But with the grace of Allah they too will find the truth of Islam, Insha'allah. I hope and pray that I can use the knowledge that the education in the Church gave me towards the propagation of Islam. The spiritual climate of West Africa is ripe for Islam and there are many projects which need doing. This is what I have been trained to do and so my path is straight and narrow for me now. **Source** : *Saudi Gazette*.

11

Raphael Narbaez, Jr.

Former Jehovah's Witness Minister

USA

Raphael attended his first Jehovah's Witness meeting at age six, gave his first Bible sermon at eight, tended his own congregation at twenty, and was headed for a position of leadership among the 904,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States.

A forty-two-year-old Latino, Raphael is a Los Anodes-based comic and lecturer. He was born in Texas, where he attended his first Jehovah's Witness meeting at age six, gave his first Bible sermon at eight, tended his own congregation at twenty, and was headed for a position of leadership among the 904,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States.1 But he traded in his Bible for a Qur'an after having braved a visit to a local mosque. On November 1, 1991, he embraced Islam, bringing to the Muslim community the organizational and speaking skills he developed among Jehovah's Witnesses. He speaks with the urgency of a new convert, but one who can make immigrant Muslims laugh at themselves.

He told his story mimicking a cast of characters.

I remember vividly being in a discussion where we were all sitting in my parents' living room and there were some other Jehovah's Witnesses there. They were talking about: "It's Armageddon! The time of the end! And Christ is coming! And you know the hailstones are going to be out here as big as cars! God is going to use all kinds of things to destroy this wicked system and remove the governments! And the Bible talks about the earth opening up! It's going to swallow whole city blocks!"

1. Reportedly, there are 4.5 million Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide.

I'm scared to death! And then my mother turned around: "See what's going to happen to you if you don't get baptized, and if you don't do God's will? The earth is going to swallow you up, or one of these huge hailstones is going to hit you on the head [klonk], knock you out, and you will not exist ever again. I'll

have to make another child"

I wasn't going to take a chance being hit by one of those big hailstones. So I got baptized. And of course Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe in the sprinkling of the water. They submerge you completely, hold you there for a second, and then bring you back up. I did that at the age of thirteen, September 7, 1963, in Pasadena, California, at the Rose Bowl. It was a big international assembly. We had 100,000 people2. We drove all the way from Lubbock,

Texas.2. 118,447 people .mended the public talks; 2,496 people were baptized.

Eventually I started giving bigger talks—ten minutes in front of the congregation. And a circuit servant3 recommended me to give the hour lectures that are done on Sunday when they invite the general public. They usually reserved those [sermons] for the elders of the congregation.

[In an authoritarian voice:} "Sure he's young. But he can handle it. He's a good Christian boy. He has no vices, and he's obedient to his parents and seems to have pretty good Bible knowledge." So at the age of sixteen I started giving hour lectures in front of whole congregations. I was assigned first a group in Sweetwater, Texas, and then eventually in Brownfield, Texas, I got my first congregation. At age twenty, I had become what they call a pioneer minister. Jehovah's Witnesses have a very sophisticated training program, and they also have kind of a quota system. You had to devote ten to twelve hours a month to door-to-door preaching. It's like sales management. IBM has nothing on these guys.

So when I became a pioneer minister, I devoted most of my full time to doing the door-to-door ministry. I had to do like 100 hours a month, and I had to have seven Bible studies. I started lecturing other congregations. I began to get a lot of responsibility, and I was accepted at a school in Brooklyn, New York,

a very elite school that Jehovah's Witnesses have for the creme de la creme, the top one percent. But I didn't go.

3. Traveling minister.

A few things no longer made sense to me. For example, the quota system. It seemed like every time I wanted to turn a corner and get into another position of responsibility I had to do these secular material things to prove my godliness. It's like if you meet your quotas [his month, God loves you. If you don't meet your quotas next month. God doesn't love you. That didn't make very much sense. One month God loves me and one month He doesn't? The other thing I starred noticing is tunnel vision. Jehovah's Witnesses are the only ones who are going to he saved in God's new order, nobody else, because all of them are practicing false religions. Well, I thought, Mother Teresa's a Catholic. That's our dire enemy. So I said, Wait a minute. Mother Teresa has spent her entire life doing things that Jesus said: take care of the poor, the sick, the orphans. Bur she's not going to have God's favor because she's a Catholic?

We criticized the Catholic Church because they had a man, a priest, whom they had to confess to. And we'd say, "You shouldn't have to go a man to confess your sins! Your sin is against God!" And yet we went to a Body of Elders. You confessed your sin to them, and they put you on hold, and said [Elder as telephone operator:] "Hold on Just a minute . . . What do you think, Lord? No? . . . Okay, I'm sorry, we tried our best but you're not repentant enough. Your sin is too big, so you cither lose your fellowship in the church or you're going to be on probation." If the sin is against God, shouldn't I directly go to God and beg for mercy?

Probably the nail that hit the coffin was that I noticed that they started reading their Bible less. Jehovah's Witnesses have books for everything that are put out by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.4 The only people on the entire planet who know

how to interpret Bible Scripture correctly are that group of men, that committee in Brooklyn, who tell Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide how to dress, how to talk, what to say, what not to say, how to apply Scripture and what the future is going to be like. God told them, so they can tell us. I appreciated the books. But if the Bible is the book of knowledge and if it's God's instructions, well, shouldn't we get our answers out of the Bible? Paul himself said find out for yourself what is a true and acceptable word of God. Don't let men tickle your ears.

4. The publishing arm of the organization. The Watchtower, its bimonthly magazine, has perhaps the highest circulation of any religious periodical—16,400,000 copies, printed in 112 languages. I starred saying, "Don't worry so much about what the Watchtower says —read the Bible for yourself." Ears started to prick up.

[Old Southerner's drawl:} "I think we got us an apostate here. Judge. Yup. I think this old boy's one taco short of something."

Even my father said, "You better watch it, young man, that's the demons talking right there. That's the demons trying to get in and cause division."

I said, "Dad, it's not the demons. People don't need to read so much of these other publications. They can find their answers with prayer and in the Bible."

Spiritually I no longer felt at ease. So in 1979, knowing that I could not make headway, 1 left, disgruntled and with a bad taste in my mouth, because all my life I had put my soul, my heart, my mind into the church. That was the problem. I didn't put it in God. I put it in a man-made organization. I can't go to other religions. As a Jehovah's Witness, I had been trained, through the Scriptures, to show that they are all wrong. That idolatry is bad. Trinity doesn't exist. I'm like a man without a religion. I was not a man without a God. But where could I go?

In 1985, I decided to come to Los Angeles and get on the Johnny

Carson show and make my mark as a great comedian and actor. I have always felt like I was born for something. I didn't know whether it was going to be finding the cure to cancer or becoming an actor. I kept praying and it got frustrating after a while.

So I Just went to the Catholic church close to my house, and I tried it. I remember on Ash Wednesday I had that ash cross on my forehead. I was trying anything I could. I went for about two or three months, and I just couldn't do it anymore, man. It was:

Stand up.

Sit down.

Stand up.

Sit down.

Okay, stick your tongue out.

You got a lot of exercise. I think I lost about five pounds. But that's about it. So now I'm more lost than ever.

But it never passed through my mind that there is not a Creator. I have His phone number, but the line's always busy.

I'm doing my little movie shots. A film called Deadly Intent. A telephone commercial in Chicago. An Exxon commercial. A couple of bank commercials. In the meantime I'm doing construction work on the side. We're working on this mall. It's the holiday season, and they put these extra booths in the hallways. There was a gal at one, and we had to pass right in front of her. I'd say, "Good morning, how are you?" If she said anything, it was "Hi." And that was it.

Finally, I said, "Miss, you never say anything. I just wanted to apologize if there was something I said wrong."

She said, "No, you see, I'm a Muslim."

"You're what?"

"I'm a Muslim, and Muslim women, we don't talk to men unless we have something specific to talk about; otherwise we don't have anything to do with men."

"Ohhhhh. Muslim."

She said, "Yes, we practice the religion of Islam."

"Islam—how do you spell that?"

"I-s-1-a-m."

At the time, I knew that Muslims were all terrorists. She doesn't even have a beard. How could she possibly be Muslim?

"How did this religion get starred?"

"Well, there was a prophet."

"A prophet?"

"Muhammad."

I started some research. But I just came from one religion. I had no intention of becoming Muslim.

The holidays are over. The booth moves. She's gone.

I continued to pray, and asked why my prayers weren't being answered. In November of 1991, I was going to bring my uncle Rockie home from the hospital. I started to empty his drawers to pack his stuff and there was a Gideon Bible. I said, God has answered my prayers. This Gideon Bible. (Of course, they put it in every hotel room.) This is a sign from God that He's ready to teach me.

So I stole the Bible.

I went home and I started praying: O God, teach me to be a Christian. Don't teach me the Jehovah's Witness way. Don't teach me the Catholic way. Teach me Your way! You would not have made this Bible so hard that ordinary people sincere in prayer could not understand it.

I got all the way through the New Testament. I started the Old Testament. Well, eventually there's a part in the Bible about the prophets.

Bing!

I said, Wait a minute, that Muslim lady said they had a prophet. How come he's not in here?

I started thinking, Muslims—one billion in the world. Man, one

out of every five people on the street theoretically could be a Muslim. And I thought: One billion people! C'mon now, Satan is good. But he's not that good.
So then I said, I'll read their book, the Qur an, and I'll see what kind of pack of lies this thing is. It probably has an illustration on how to disassemble an AK-47. So I went to an Arabic bookstore.
They asked, "What can I help you with?"
"I'm looking for a Qur'an."
"Okay, we have some over here."
They had some very nice ones—thirty dollars, forty dollars.
"Look, I just want to read it, I don't want to become one, okay?"
"Okay, we have this little five-dollar paperback edition."
I went home, and started reading my Qur'an from the beginning, with Al-Fatihah. And I could not get my eyes off of it.
Hey, look at this. It talks about a Noah in here. We have Noah in our Bible too. Hey, it talks Lot and Abraham. I can't believe it. I never knew Satan's name was Iblis. Hey, how about that.
When you get that picture on your TV set and it's got a little bit of static and you push that button [klop\—fine-tune. That's exactly what happened with the Qur'an. I went through the whole thing. So I said, Okay, I've done this, now what's the next thing you got to do? Well, you gotta go to their meeting place. I looked in the yellow pages, and I finally found it: Islamic Center of Southern California, on Vermont. I called and they said, "Come on Friday."
Now I really start getting nervous, 'cause now I know I'm going to have to confront Habib and his AK-47.
I want people to understand what it's like for an American Christian coming into Islam. I'm kidding about the AK-47, but I don't know if these guys have daggers under their coats, you know.
So I come up to the front, and sure enough, there's this six-foot-three, 240-pound brother, beard and everything, and I'm Just in

awe.
I walked up and said, "Excuse me, sir."
[Arabic accent:] "Go to the back!"
He thought I was already a brother.
I said, "Yessir, yessir" [meekly}.
I didn't know what I was going back for, but I went back anyway. They had the tent and the rugs were out. I'm standing there, kind of shy, and people are sitting down listening to the lecture. And people are saying. Go ahead, brother, sit down. And I'm going. No, thanks, no, thanks, I'm just visiting.
So finally the lecture's over. They're all lined up for prayer and they go into sajdah. I was really taken aback.
It started making sense intellectually, in my muscles, in my bones, in my heart and my soul.
So prayers are over. I say, hey, who's going to recognize me? So I start to mingle like I'm one of the brothers, and I'm walking into the mosque and a brother says, "Assalaamu alaikum." And I thought, Did he say "salt and bacon"?
"Assalaamu alaikum."
There's another guy who said "salt and bacon" to me.
I didn't know what in the world they were saying, but they all smiled. Before one of these guys noticed that I was nor supposed to be there and took me to the torture chamber, or beheaded me, I wanted to see as much as I could. So eventually I went to the library, and there was a young Egyptian brother; his name was Omar. God sent him to me.
Omar comes up to me, and he says, "Excuse me. This your first rime here?" He has a real strong accent.
And I said, Yeah, it is.
"Oh, very good. You are Muslim?"
"No, I'm just reading a little."
"Oh, you are studying? This is your first visit to a mosque?"
"Yes."

"Come, let me show you around." And he grabs me by the hand, and I'm walking with another man—holding hands. I said, These Muslims are friendly.
So he shows me around.
"First of all, this is our prayer hall, and you take your shoes off right here."
"What are these things?"
"These are little cubicles. That's where you put your shoes."
"Why?"
"Well, because you're approaching the prayer area, and it's very holy. You don't go in there with your shoes on; it's kept real clean."
So he takes me to the men's room.
"And right here, this is where we do wudu,"
"Voodoo! I didn't read anything about voodoo!"
"No, not voodoo. Wudu!"
"Okay, because I saw that stuff with the dolls and the pins, and I'm just not ready for that kind of commitment yet."
He says, "No, wudu, that's when we clean ourselves."
"Whv do you do that?"
"Well, when you pray to God, you have to be clean, so we wash our hands and feet."
So I learned all these things. He let me go, and said, Come back again.
I went back and asked the librarian for a booklet on prayer, and I went home and practiced. I felt that if I was trying to do it right, God would accept it. I Just continued to read and read and visit the mosque.
I had a commitment to go on a tour of the Midwest on a comedy circuit. Well, I took a prayer rug with me. I knew that I was supposed to pray at certain times, but there are certain places where you are not supposed to pray, one of which is in the bathroom. I went into a men's room on a tourist stop and I laid

out my carpet and I started doing my prayers.

I came back, and when Ramadan was over, I started getting calls from different parts of the country to go and lecture as a Jehovah's Witness minister who embraced Islam. People find me a novelty.

[Two immigrants converse:}

"This guy likes apple pie and he drives a Chevy truck. He is a red-blooded American boy. He was a Jehovah's Witness."

"Those people that come in the morning?"

"Yeah, those."

"That never let us sleep on Sundays?"

"Yeah, this guy was one of them. Now he's one of us."

Eventually somebody would come up to me and say [Pakistani accent],

"Oh, brother, your talk was so good. But you know, in the Shafi'i school of thought—"

The only thing I could do was turn to them and say, "Gee, brother, I'm so sorry, I wish I knew about that, but I don't know anything about Islam except what's in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Some of them are taken aback and say, "Ha-ha! Poor brother. He doesn't know anything. He only knows the Qur'an."

Well, that's what I'm supposed to know. And it's been a very loving protection. I think it's all in God's hands.

Raphael performed hajj in 1993.

Taken from the book
American Jihad: Islam after Malcolm X
Steven Barboza, 1995



12

Dr. Jerald F. Dirks

Former minister of the United

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U.S.A.

He holds a Master's degree in Divinity from Harvard University and a Doctorate in Psychology from the University of Denver.

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One of my earliest childhood memories is of hearing the church bell toll for Sunday morning worship in the small, rural town in which I was raised. The Methodist Church was an old, wooden structure with a bell tower, two children's Sunday School classrooms cubbyholed behind folding, wooden doors to separate it from the sanctuary, and a choir loft that housed the Sunday school classrooms for the older children. It stood less than two blocks from my home. As the bell rang, we would come together as a family, and make our weekly pilgrimage to the church.

In that rural setting from the 1950s, the three churches in the town of about 500 were the center of community life. The local Methodist Church, to which my family belonged, sponsored ice cream socials with hand-cranked, homemade ice cream, chicken potpie dinners, and corn roasts. My family and I were always involved in all three, but each came only once a year. In addition, there was a two-week community Bible school every June, and I was a regular attendee through my eighth grade year in school. However, Sunday morning worship and Sunday school were weekly events, and I strove to keep extending my collection of perfect attendance pins and of awards for memorizing Bible verses.

By my junior high school days, the local Methodist Church had closed, and we were attending the Methodist Church in the neighboring town, which was only slightly larger than the town in which

I lived. There, my thoughts first began to focus on the ministry as a personal calling. I became active in the Methodist Youth Fellowship, and eventually served as both a district and a conference officer. I also became the regular "preacher" during the annual Youth Sunday service. My preaching began to draw community-wide attention, and before long I was occasionally filling pulpits at other churches, at a nursing home, and at various church-affiliated youth and ladies groups, where I typically set attendance records.

By age 17, when I began my freshman year at Harvard College, my decision to enter the ministry had solidified. During my freshman year, I enrolled in a two-semester course in comparative religion, which was taught by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, whose specific area of expertise was Islam. During that course, I gave far less attention to Islam, than I did to other religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, as the latter two seemed so much more esoteric and strange to me. In contrast, Islam appeared to be somewhat similar to my own Christianity. As such, I didn't concentrate on it as much as I probably should have, although I can remember writing a term paper for the course on the concept of revelation in the Qur'an. Nonetheless, as the course was one of rigorous academic standards and demands, I did acquire a small library of about a half dozen books on Islam, all of which were written by non-Muslims, and all of which were to serve me in good stead 25 years later. I also acquired two different English translations of the meaning of the Qur'an, which I read at the time.

That spring, Harvard named me a Hollis Scholar, signifying that I was one of the top pre-theology students in the college. The summer between my freshman and sophomore years at Harvard, I worked as a youth minister at a fairly large United Methodist Church. The following summer, I obtained my License to Preach from the United Methodist Church. Upon graduating from

Harvard College in 1971, I enrolled at the Harvard Divinity School, and there obtained my Master of Divinity degree in 1974, having been previously ordained into the Deaconate of the United Methodist Church in 1972, and having previously received a Stewart Scholarship from the United Methodist Church as a supplement to my Harvard Divinity School scholarships. During my seminary education, I also completed a two-year externship program as a hospital chaplain at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston. Following graduation from Harvard Divinity School, I spent the summer as the minister of two United Methodist churches in rural Kansas, where attendance soared to heights not seen in those churches for several years.

Seen from the outside, I was a very promising young minister, who had received an excellent education, drew large crowds to the Sunday morning worship service, and had been successful at every stop along the ministerial path. However, seen from the inside, I was fighting a constant war to maintain my personal integrity in the face of my ministerial responsibilities. This war was far removed from the ones presumably fought by some later televangelists in unsuccessfully trying to maintain personal sexual morality. Likewise, it was a far different war than those fought by the headline-grabbing pedophilic priests of the current moment. However, my struggle to maintain personal integrity may be the most common one encountered by the better-educated members of the ministry.

There is some irony in the fact that the supposedly best, brightest, and most idealistic of ministers-to-be are selected for the very best of seminary education, e.g. that offered at that time at the Harvard Divinity School. The irony is that, given such an education, the seminarian is exposed to as much of the actual historical truth as is known about: 1) the formation of the early, "mainstream" church, and how it was shaped by geopolitical considerations; 2) the "original" reading of various Biblical texts,

many of which are in sharp contrast to what most Christians read when they pick up their Bible, although gradually some of this information is being incorporated into newer and better translations; 3) the evolution of such concepts as a triune godhead and the "sonship" of Jesus, peace be upon him; 4) the non-religious considerations that underlie many Christian creeds and doctrines; 5) the existence of those early churches and Christian movements which never accepted the concept of a triune godhead, and which never accepted the concept of the divinity of Jesus, peace be upon him; and 6) etc. (Some of these fruits of my seminary education are recounted in more detail in my recent book, The Cross and the Crescent: An Interfaith Dialogue between Christianity and Islam, Amana Publications, 2001.) As such, it is no real wonder that almost a majority of such seminary graduates leave seminary, not to "fill pulpits", where they would be asked to preach that which they know is not true, but to enter the various counseling professions. Such was also the case for me, as I went on to earn a master's and doctorate in clinical psychology. I continued to call myself a Christian, because that was a needed bit of self-identity, and because I was, after all, an ordained minister, even though my full time job was as a mental health professional. However, my seminary education had taken care of any belief I might have had regarding a triune godhead or the divinity of Jesus, peace be upon him. (Polls regularly reveal that ministers are less likely to believe these and other dogmas of the church than are the laity they serve, with ministers more likely to understand such terms as "son of God" metaphorically, while their parishioners understand it literally.) I thus became a "Christmas and Easter Christian", attending church very sporadically, and then gritting my teeth and biting my tongue as I listened to sermons espousing that which I knew was not the case.

None of the above should be taken to imply that I was any less

religious or spiritually oriented than I had once been. I prayed regularly, my belief in a supreme deity remained solid and secure, and I conducted my personal life in line with the ethics I had once been taught in church and Sunday school. I simply knew better than to buy into the man-made dogmas and articles of faith of the organized church, which were so heavily laden with the pagan influences, polytheistic notions, and geo-political considerations of a bygone era.

As the years passed by, I became increasingly concerned about the loss of religiousness in American society at large. Religiousness is a living, breathing spirituality and morality within individuals, and should not be confused with religiosity, which is concerned with the rites, rituals, and formalized creeds of some organized entity, e.g. the church. American culture increasingly appeared to have lost its moral and religious compass. Two out of every three marriages ended in divorce; violence was becoming an increasingly inherent part of our schools and our roads; self-responsibility was on the wane; self-discipline was being submerged by a "if it feels good, do it" morality; various Christian leaders and institutions were being swamped by sexual and financial scandals; and emotions justified behavior, however odious it might be. American culture was becoming a morally bankrupt institution, and I was feeling quite alone in my personal religious vigil.

It was at this juncture that I began to come into contact with the local Muslim community. For some years before, my wife and I had been actively involved in doing research on the history of the Arabian horse. Eventually, in order to secure translations of various Arabic documents, this research brought us into contact with Arab Americans who happened to be Muslims. Our first such contact was with Jamal in the summer of 1991.

After an initial telephone conversation, Jamal visited our home, and offered to do some translations for us, and to help guide us

through the history of the Arabian horse in the Middle East. Before Jamal left that afternoon, he asked if he might: use our bathroom to wash before saying his scheduled prayers; and borrow a piece of newspaper to use as a prayer rug, so he could say his scheduled prayers before leaving our house. We, of course, obliged, but wondered if there was something more appropriate that we could give him to use than a newspaper. Without our ever realizing it at the time, Jamal was practicing a very beautiful form of Dawa (preaching or exhortation). He made no comment about the fact that we were not Muslims, and he didn't preach anything to us about his religious beliefs. He "merely" presented us with his example, an example that spoke volumes, if one were willing to be receptive to the lesson.

Over the next 16 months, contact with Jamal slowly increased in frequency, until it was occurring on a biweekly to weekly basis. During these visits, Jamal never preached to me about Islam, never questioned me about my own religious beliefs or convictions, and never verbally suggested that I become a Muslim. However, I was beginning to learn a lot. First, there was the constant behavioral example of Jamal observing his scheduled prayers. Second, there was the behavioral example of how Jamal conducted his daily life in a highly moral and ethical manner, both in his business world and in his social world. Third, there was the behavioral example of how Jamal interacted with his two children. For my wife, Jamal's wife provided a similar example. Fourth, always within the framework of helping me to understand Arabian horse history in the Middle East, Jamal began to share with me: 1) stories from Arab and Islamic history; 2) sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him; and 3) Qur'anic verses and their contextual meaning. In point of fact, our every visit now included at least a 30 minute conversation centered on some aspect of Islam, but always presented in terms of helping me intellectually understand the Islamic context of

Arabian horse history. I was never told "this is the way things are", I was merely told "this is what Muslims typically believe". Since I wasn't being "preached to", and since Jamal never inquired as to my own beliefs, I didn't need to bother attempting to justify my own position. It was all handled as an intellectual exercise, not as proselytizing.

Gradually, Jamal began to introduce us to other Arab families in the local Muslim community. There was Wa'el and his family, Khalid and his family, and a few others. Consistently, I observed individuals and families who were living their lives on a much higher ethical plane than the American society in which we were all embedded. Maybe there was something to the practice of Islam that I had missed during my collegiate and seminary days.

By December, 1992, I was beginning to ask myself some serious questions about where I was and what I was doing. These questions were prompted by the following considerations. 1) Over the course of the prior 16 months, our social life had become increasingly centered on the Arab component of the local Muslim community. By December, probably 75% of our social life was being spent with Arab Muslims. 2) By virtue of my seminary training and education, I knew how badly the Bible had been corrupted (and often knew exactly when, where, and why), I had no belief in any triune godhead, and I had no belief in anything more than a metaphorical "sonship" of Jesus, peace be upon him. In short, while I certainly believed in God, I was as strict a monotheist as my Muslim friends. 3) My personal values and sense of morality were much more in keeping with my Muslim friends than with the "Christian" society around me. After all, I had the non-confrontational examples of Jamal, Khalid, and Wa'el as illustrations. In short, my nostalgic yearning for the type of community in which I had been raised was finding gratification in the Muslim community. American society

might be morally bankrupt, but that did not appear to be the case for that part of the Muslim community with which I had had contact. Marriages were stable, spouses were committed to each other, and honesty, integrity, self-responsibility, and family values were emphasized. My wife and I had attempted to live our lives that same way, but for several years I had felt that we were doing so in the context of a moral vacuum. The Muslim community appeared to be different.

The different threads were being woven together into a single strand. Arabian horses, my childhood upbringing, my foray into the Christian ministry and my seminary education, my nostalgic yearnings for a moral society, and my contact with the Muslim community were becoming intricately intertwined. My self-questioning came to a head when I finally got around to asking myself exactly what separated me from the beliefs of my Muslim friends. I suppose that I could have raised that question with Jamal or with Khalid, but I wasn't ready to take that step. I had never discussed my own religious beliefs with them, and I didn't think that I wanted to introduce that topic of conversation into our friendship. As such, I began to pull off the bookshelf all the books on Islam that I had acquired in my collegiate and seminary days. However far my own beliefs were from the traditional position of the church, and however seldom I actually attended church, I still identified myself as being a Christian, and so I turned to the works of Western scholars. That month of December, I read half a dozen or so books on Islam by Western scholars, including one biography of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Further, I began to read two different English translations of the meaning of the Qur'an. I never spoke to my Muslim friends about this personal quest of self-discovery. I never mentioned what types of books I was reading, nor ever spoke about why I was reading these books. However, occasionally I would run a very circumscribed question past one of

them.

While I never spoke to my Muslim friends about those books, my wife and I had numerous conversations about what I was reading. By the last week of December of 1992, I was forced to admit to myself, that I could find no area of substantial disagreement between my own religious beliefs and the general tenets of Islam. While I was ready to acknowledge that Muhammad, peace be upon him, was a prophet of (one who spoke for or under the inspiration of) God, and while I had absolutely no difficulty affirming that there was no god besides God/Allah, glorified and exalted is He, I was still hesitating to make any decision. I could readily admit to myself that I had far more in common with Islamic beliefs as I then understood them, than I did with the traditional Christianity of the organized church. I knew only too well that I could easily confirm from my seminary training and education most of what the Qur'an had to say about Christianity, the Bible, and Jesus, peace be upon him. Nonetheless, I hesitated. Further, I rationalized my hesitation by maintaining to myself that I really didn't know the nitty-gritty details of Islam, and that my areas of agreement were confined to general concepts. As such, I continued to read, and then to re-read.

One's sense of identity, of who one is, is a powerful affirmation of one's own position in the cosmos. In my professional practice, I had occasionally been called upon to treat certain addictive disorders, ranging from smoking, to alcoholism, to drug abuse. As a clinician, I knew that the basic physical addiction had to be overcome to create the initial abstinence. That was the easy part of treatment. As Mark Twain once said: "Quitting smoking is easy; I've done it hundreds of times". However, I also knew that the key to maintaining that abstinence over an extended time period was overcoming the client's psychological addiction, which was heavily grounded in the client's

basic sense of identity, i.e. the client identified to himself that he was "a smoker", or that he was "a drinker", etc. The addictive behavior had become part and parcel of the client's basic sense of identity, of the client's basic sense of self. Changing this sense of identity was crucial to the maintenance of the psychotherapeutic "cure". This was the difficult part of treatment. Changing one's basic sense of identity is a most difficult task. One's psyche tends to cling to the old and familiar, which seem more psychologically comfortable and secure than the new and unfamiliar.

On a professional basis, I had the above knowledge, and used it on a daily basis. However, ironically enough, I was not yet ready to apply it to myself, and to the issue of my own hesitation surrounding my religious identity. For 43 years, my religious identity had been neatly labeled as "Christian", however many qualifications I might have added to that term over the years. Giving up that label of personal identity was no easy task. It was part and parcel of how I defined my very being. Given the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that my hesitation served the purpose of insuring that I could keep my familiar religious identity of being a Christian, although a Christian who believed like a Muslim believed.

It was now the very end of December, and my wife and I were filling out our application forms for U.S. passports, so that a proposed Middle Eastern journey could become a reality. One of the questions had to do with religious affiliation. I didn't even think about it, and automatically fell back on the old and familiar, as I penned in "Christian". It was easy, it was familiar, and it was comfortable.

However, that comfort was momentarily disrupted when my wife asked me how I had answered the question on religious identity on the application form. I immediately replied, "Christian", and chuckled audibly. Now, one of Freud's contributions to the understanding of the human psyche was his realization that laughter

is often a release of psychological tension. However wrong Freud may have been in many aspects of his theory of psychosexual development, his insights into laughter were quite on target. I had laughed! What was this psychological tension that I had need to release through the medium of laughter?

I then hurriedly went on to offer my wife a brief affirmation that I was a Christian, not a Muslim. In response to which, she politely informed me that she was merely asking whether I had written "Christian", or "Protestant", or "Methodist". On a professional basis, I knew that a person does not defend himself against an accusation that hasn't been made. (If, in the course of a session of psychotherapy, my client blurted out, "I'm not angry about that", and I hadn't even broached the topic of anger, it was clear that my client was feeling the need to defend himself against a charge that his own unconscious was making. In short, he really was angry, but he wasn't ready to admit it or to deal with it.) If my wife hadn't made the accusation, i.e. "you are a Muslim", then the accusation had to have come from my own unconscious, as I was the only other person present. I was aware of this, but still I hesitated. The religious label that had been stuck to my sense of identity for 43 years was not going to come off easily.

About a month had gone by since my wife's question to me. It was now late in January of 1993. I had set aside all the books on Islam by the Western scholars, as I had read them all thoroughly. The two English translations of the meaning of the Qur'an were back on the bookshelf, and I was busy reading yet a third English translation of the meaning of the Qur'an. Maybe in this translation I would find some sudden justification for…

I was taking my lunch hour from my private practice at a local Arab restaurant that I had started to frequent. I entered as usual, seated myself at a small table, and opened my third English translation of the meaning of the Qur'an to where I had left off in my reading. I figured I might as well get some reading done over my

lunch hour. Moments later, I became aware that Mahmoud was at my shoulder, and waiting to take my order. He glanced at what I was reading, but said nothing about it. My order taken, I returned to the solitude of my reading.

A few minutes later, Mahmoud's wife, Iman, an American Muslim, who wore the Hijab (scarf) and modest dress that I had come to associate with female Muslims, brought me my order. She commented that I was reading the Qur'an, and politely asked if I were a Muslim. The word was out of my mouth before it could be modified by any social etiquette or politeness: "No!" That single word was said forcefully, and with more than a hint of irritability. With that, Iman politely retired from my table.

What was happening to me? I had behaved rudely and somewhat aggressively. What had this woman done to deserve such behavior from me? This wasn't like me. Given my childhood upbringing, I still used "sir" and "ma'am" when addressing clerks and cashiers who were waiting on me in stores. I could pretend to ignore my own laughter as a release of tension, but I couldn't begin to ignore this sort of unconscionable behavior from myself. My reading was set aside, and I mentally stewed over this turn of events throughout my meal. The more I stewed, the guiltier I felt about my behavior. I knew that when Iman brought me my check at the end of the meal, I was going to need to make some amends. If for no other reason, simple politeness demanded it. Furthermore, I was really quite disturbed about how resistant I had been to her innocuous question. What was going on in me that I responded with that much force to such a simple and straightforward question? Why did that one, simple question lead to such atypical behavior on my part?

Later, when Iman came with my check, I attempted a roundabout apology by saying: "I'm afraid I was a little abrupt in answering your question before. If you were asking me whether I believe that there is only one God, then my answer is yes. If

you were asking me whether I believe that Muhammad was one of the prophets of that one God, then my answer is yes." She very nicely and very supportively said: "That's okay; it takes some people a little longer than others."

Perhaps, the readers of this will be kind enough to note the psychological games I was playing with myself without chuckling too hard at my mental gymnastics and behavior. I well knew that in my own way, using my own words, I had just said the Shahadah, the Islamic testimonial of faith, i.e. "I testify that there is no god but Allah, and I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah". However, having said that, and having recognized what I said, I could still cling to my old and familiar label of religious identity. After all, I hadn't said I was a Muslim. I was simply a Christian, albeit an atypical Christian, who was willing to say that there was one God, not a triune godhead, and who was willing to say that Muhammad was one of the prophets inspired by that one God. If a Muslim wanted to accept me as being a Muslim that was his or her business, and his or her label of religious identity. However, it was not mine. I thought I had found my way out of my crisis of religious identity. I was a Christian, who would carefully explain that I agreed with, and was willing to testify to, the Islamic testimonial of faith. Having made my tortured explanation, and having parsed the English language to within an inch of its life, others could hang whatever label on me they wished. It was their label, and not mine.

It was now March of 1993, and my wife and I were enjoying a five-week vacation in the Middle East. It was also the Islamic month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast from day break until sunset. Because we were so often staying with or being escorted around by family members of our Muslim friends back in the States, my wife and I had decided that we also would fast, if for no other reason than common courtesy. During this time, I had also started to perform the five daily prayers of Islam with

my newfound, Middle Eastern, Muslim friends. After all, there was nothing in those prayers with which I could disagree.

I was a Christian, or so I said. After all, I had been born into a Christian family, had been given a Christian upbringing, had attended church and Sunday school every Sunday as a child, had graduated from a prestigious seminary, and was an ordained minister in a large Protestant denomination. However, I was also a Christian: who didn't believe in a triune godhead or in the divinity of Jesus, peace be upon him; who knew quite well how the Bible had been corrupted; who had said the Islamic testimony of faith in my own carefully parsed words; who had fasted during Ramadan; who was saying Islamic prayers five times a day; and who was deeply impressed by the behavioral examples I had witnessed in the Muslim community, both in America and in the Middle East. (Time and space do not permit me the luxury of documenting in detail all of the examples of personal morality and ethics I encountered in the Middle East.) If asked if I were a Muslim, I could and did do a five-minute monologue detailing the above, and basically leaving the question unanswered. I was playing intellectual word games, and succeeding at them quite nicely.

It was now late in our Middle Eastern trip. An elderly friend who spoke no English and I were walking down a winding, little road, somewhere in one of the economically disadvantaged areas of greater 'Amman, Jordan. As we walked, an elderly man approached us from the opposite direction, said, "Salam 'Alaykum", i.e., "peace be upon you", and offered to shake hands. We were the only three people there. I didn't speak Arabic, and neither my friend nor the stranger spoke English. Looking at me, the stranger asked, "Muslim?"

At that precise moment in time, I was fully and completely trapped. There were no intellectual word games to be played, because I could only communicate in English, and they could

only communicate in Arabic. There was no translator present to bail me out of this situation, and to allow me to hide behind my carefully prepared English monologue. I couldn't pretend I didn't understand the question, because it was all too obvious that I had. My choices were suddenly, unpredictably, and inexplicably reduced to just two: I could say "N'am", i.e., "yes"; or I could say "La", i.e., "no". The choice was mine, and I had no other. I had to choose, and I had to choose now; it was just that simple. Praise be to Allah, I answered, "N'am".

With saying that one word, all the intellectual word games were now behind me. With the intellectual word games behind me, the psychological games regarding my religious identity were also behind me. I wasn't some strange, atypical Christian. I was a Muslim. Praise be to Allah, my wife of 33 years also became a Muslim about that same time.

Not too many months after our return to America from the Middle East, a neighbor invited us over to his house, saying that he wanted to talk with us about our conversion to Islam. He was a retired Methodist minister, with whom I had had several conversations in the past. Although we had occasionally talked superficially about such issues as the artificial construction of the Bible from various, earlier, independent sources, we had never had any in-depth conversation about religion. I knew only that he appeared to have acquired a solid seminary education, and that he sang in the local church choir every Sunday.

My initial reaction was, "Oh, oh, here it comes". Nonetheless, it is a Muslim's duty to be a good neighbor, and it is a Muslim's duty to be willing to discuss Islam with others. As such, I accepted the invitation for the following evening, and spent most of the waking part of the next 24 hours contemplating how best to approach this gentleman in his requested topic of conversation. The appointed time came, and we drove over to our neighbor's. After a few moments of small talk, he finally asked

why I had decided to become a Muslim. I had waited for this question, and had my answer carefully prepared. "As you know with your seminary education, there were a lot of non-religious considerations which led up to and shaped the decisions of the Council of Nicaea." He immediately cut me off with a simple statement: "You finally couldn't stomach the polytheism anymore, could you?" He knew exactly why I was a Muslim, and he didn't disagree with my decision! For himself, at his age and at his place in life, he was electing to be "an atypical Christian". Allah willing, he has by now completed his journey from cross to crescent.

There are sacrifices to be made in being a Muslim in America. For that matter, there are sacrifices to be made in being a Muslim anywhere. However, those sacrifices may be more acutely felt in America, especially among American converts. Some of those sacrifices are very predictable, and include altered dress and abstinence from alcohol, pork, and the taking of interest on one's money. Some of those sacrifices are less predictable. For example, one Christian family, with whom we were close friends, informed us that they could no longer associate with us, as they could not associate with anyone "who does not take Jesus Christ as his personal savior". In addition, quite a few of my professional colleagues altered their manner of relating to me. Whether it was coincidence or not, my professional referral base dwindled, and there was almost a 30% drop in income as a result. Some of these less predictable sacrifices were hard to accept, although the sacrifices were a small price to pay for what was received in return.

For those contemplating the acceptance of Islam and the surrendering of oneself to Allah—glorified and exalted is He, there may well be sacrifices along the way. Many of these sacrifices are easily predicted, while others may be rather surprising and unexpected. There is no denying the existence of these sacri-

fices, and I don't intend to sugar coat that pill for you. Nonetheless, don't be overly troubled by these sacrifices. In the final analysis, these sacrifices are less important than you presently think. Allah willing, you will find these sacrifices a very cheap coin to pay for the "goods" you are purchasing.



13

Selma A. Cook

Former Missionary

Australia

The beautiful sound of the Arabic recitation and then the plain language of the English translation struck a chord within me. The beautiful story of Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) and his miracle birth to the virgin Mary was a marvel of simplicity.

Whenever I hear the sound of the ocean crashing upon itself in never-ending movement – rising and falling as it measures out time, I think about the beginning of my life and the journey I began and am still traveling. As the tides inch their way towards me where I sit on the sand, I remember that the time of my death remains unknown to me. I feel a sense of fear; of urgency to do more, learn more, discover more before the tides of my own life rise and sweep me along to the Hereafter. I am like a grain of sand – one tiny part of human existence – a small part of all that has lived.

For many years I lived alone, isolated in a world of fear and unrest. Some happy childhood memories, times of love and joy were always covered by a cloud of uncertainty; a feeling of being lost but not knowing where my real place was. I watched my life unfold, taking note of the decisions that I made, which either drove me forward or pushed me back. I was constantly moving further away from the light or getting closer to it. It was the source of truth whose reality I recognized deep within my heart.

"And Allah increases in guidance those who walk aright and love Allah much." (Surah Maryam (Mary), verse 76)

In my isolation, I sought help and comfort in the One Who had created me; I had no doubt that there exists a Creator and Sustainer of all things. I knew this as clearly and as surely as I know the sun rises and sets, the movement of the tides, the echo of a thunder storm and the delicate beauty of a spider's web. No! This world was no accident! As sure as an explosion in a paint factory could never produce an encyclopedia, I always knew this world has a Designer – the Source of all peace.

On Him I called, yet at that time I didn't know His name but only the reality of Him. His Existence and His Creation was so overwhelmingly obvious that I knew I could ask and He would give: I asked for peace in my troubled heart; I asked to understand my life and what He wanted from me. I asked for guidance for I knew I was lost.

At sixteen years of age, I prayed as I had always done, knowing that He is so Powerful and All-Encompassing that there was no need to pray in the name of Jesus (peace be upon him). I forced myself to throw off the shackles of Christianity and dependence upon Jesus as a medium between my Creator and myself. I felt a surge of peace and inner quietness. It is a feeling that guided me and still does, telling my spirit that I'm on the right way – just keep going. Step by step I moved towards the light of truth whose rays flickered far in the distance. I began to measure the success of my life by the amount of peace that I felt within, but so often in the materialistic world in which I lived, this peace and inner joy was drowned out by trivial pursuits and passing pleasures.

A deep awareness followed me that every step I took in life is significant – every word counted and followed me like the echo of my reality. So many paths of life confronted me, each one having its own destination. I was in a state of confusion but guided by my inner feeling, which acted like a radar. Surely, the one who wants to be guided, will be guided.

I always felt close to God and prayer was a way of life for me. Deep in my mind, for I could never voice any doubts, I had some misgivings about what I'd been taught about Jesus (peace be upon him): some things didn't make sense to me, but as a missionary I felt I was calling to God, not to a particular church. I could recognize a harmony and structure in all the nature around me, yet I found an absence of order wherever I looked around people.

His Existence and His Creation was so overwhelmingly obvious

that I knew I could ask and He would give…

I learned to love Jesus as a messenger of God but it seemed strange to me, that God would require a sacrifice in order to forgive us. I believed that God was above having any need. I felt I could communicate with Him as I was, without the necessity of an intermediary because, again, God didn't need any help to hear what I said.

As a Christian I had been taught that Jesus was God's son and that man could only be saved through belief in Jesus. I wondered why God, who was so obviously powerful would require anything, let alone a son to fulfill His purpose. Why couldn't the Creator just forgive His creation without an intermediary. I also knew deep within my heart that when mankind stepped away from righteousness, all harmony was lost.

I clung to what I'd been taught since a child but I kept looking, searching and thinking.

At school, I learned to be "tolerant." People said that all religions lead to God. However, instinctively I knew that I knew without any doubt that there was one God, one system of life, one truth, and one path leading to it. There couldn't be many diverging paths that were so contradictory! The Jews hate Jesus, the Christians love him, other religions ignore him and some others do not even know him. Are they all true? At the end of all these religions is there one God; the Creator who made everything so harmonious in nature. Is this the same God who created the marvels of the universe but also allows all this ignorance and confusion and calls it worship? Such an idea lacked logic, respect for human dignity and mercy from the Creator. One God, one truth, one way. But where was it? I kept looking.

Life changes continually but usually these changes take place gradually and are of a subtle nature, and then, from time to time, intermittent situations pound our lives and make us pause and take new directions. One such vital crossroads confronted me

in 1983. I was moving into a new flat and had the choice of two apartments. I was unsure which one to take, so as usual, I prayed and asked. I had a very strong feeling that if I moved into one particular flat my life would change dramatically. I was as a boat cast adrift on the sea, led by the winds and tides but my weight affected the direction of the boat. Likewise, our intentions, decisions, and actions steer the course of our lives.

I met my neighbors who were Muslims. I thought I would do some missionary work. I always like to remind people about the Creator, goodness, and the existence of truth. What little I knew about Muslims and Islam was colored by the Christian-Judaic doctrine in which I'd been raised. I was taught that Muslims did not believe in Jesus (peace be upon him), that they were ignorant heathens who deserved to be usurped from the land of Palestine. How ignorant I was! They listened to me patiently, and then I too listened to them. They did not try to explain any complicated issues, they just read to me from the Qur'an. First they read in Arabic, then in English. It was the chapter of Maryam (Mary). I listened in silence. The sound was so tranquil – something independent from the reader, something that contained the ability to touch hearts, remove the obstacles we place in front of ourselves, and redirect us towards light, guidance, and that constantly elusive element of life called happiness. I cried. I could not find words to explain my tears and all I could say was, "It's beautiful."

The beautiful sound of the Arabic recitation and then t he plain and direct language of the English translation struck a chord within me. The beautiful story of Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) and his miracle birth to the virgin Mary was a marvel of simplicity. God, or as I learned to call Him, Allah, had sent Prophets and Messengers since the beginning of time - Prophet Adam (peace be upon him), Prophet Abraham, Prophet Moses, Prophet Jesus and Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them

all) and many others. They all came with God's message: to eschew all worship except the worship of the One True God and to submit to His Will. Such is the meaning of Islam. A Muslim is one who bows to the Will of Allah refusing the worship of anyone or anything else while seeking to establish piety on earth.

The simple story of Jesus (peace be upon him) and his pious mother. The fact that he (peace be upon him) was a special and wondrous creation; that Allah, the Almighty said "Be" and it was. A miracle birth! No need for an intermediary!

One God! One truth! One way of life! One path! I was home!

I learned that prayer is strictly between the individual and God, and that each person is held responsible for the actions they have sent forward. No one can bear the sins of another, not even a parent, child, or friend. Thus Jesus (peace be upon him), is loved and revered as a Prophet and Messenger of Allah; for his righteousness and closeness to Allah. I learnt that Muslims believe that Jesus (peace be upon him) will come again to the earth and that all the confusion about his origin and role will be wiped away.

Each and every human being on this earth, will be held accountable before Allah, the Almighty on the Day of Judgment; it is up to us to obey or disobey our Creator. A famous saying of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was that, if we turn to Allah He will turn to us. If we approach Allah by a hand's span, He approaches us by an arm's length, and if we go towards Him walking, He rushes towards us. I knew deep within myself that I had reached the place of light that I had sought for so many years. I was twenty-two years old. I had been a missionary since I was seventeen. In my heart, I left the church the moment I heard the Qur'an. But I decided to go to the church one more time to publicly announce in the monthly "testimony meeting" the following Sunday that my life had taken a new direction and I wouldn't be seeing them again, but that I was glad to have known

them and wished them all well.

I knew deep within myself that I had reached the place of light that I had sought for so many years…

My leaving the church caused something of an uproar in my family and community. Deep down I knew I was alone in life. Family and friends could come close to us but no one really knows us or can help us except Allah. Indeed, we are born alone, will die alone and will stand for judgment alone. I had always felt alone. I was right. The loud and often hostile reaction of people is easy to confront when one remains in a state of reliance upon Allah, the Almighty. I considered myself a Muslim but had a long way to go, much to change and much to understand. I felt like a young child who had just taken her first steps. I knew with conviction that Allah was the One to whom I'd always prayed but it wasn't until that time that I knew His name and reality. I spent the next five years rediscovering my life. As I read the Qur'an in English, I knew that all the things I had ever thought or felt were contained in a book that existed before this world came into being. How deeply grateful I am that Allah has guided me to Islam, despite the propaganda and hype that abounds this world concerning it. Indeed, Allah, the Almighty, will never allow His message to stop, and He will rescue those who have fallen prey to this life if only they turn to Him with sincerity.

**This story is based upon excerpts from "The Miracles of My Life" by Selma A. Cook. It has been reproduced with the permission and assistance of the author.*



14

Dr. Yahya A.R. Lehmann

Former Roman Catholic Priest

Germany

The public declaration of the monotheistic faith of Islam from the minaret above the Jerusalem Temple sounded to me like a new religious message of great challenging force.

ALLAHU AKBAR, there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger.

I hear this call to worship the one God alone for the first time in my life from the minaret of the Al-Aqsa Mosque standing in the ancient temple square of Jerusalem. I had arrived in this city, sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, for the Easter pilgrimage, as a research fellow for special studies in the then recently discovered and deciphered Dead Sea Scrolls. I had spent most of the night hours after the Christian Good Friday celebrations praying and meditating in the Church of the Holy Sepulcre, and had witnessed the busy bickering of priests and clergymen of differing Christian Church-denominations about precedence into the sombre grave-chamber of Christ and about entrance-fees there payable by their respective flocks.

Surprising Encounter

After passing the gloomy Wailing Wall, old darkened stones, last relics of the former Herodean Temple, dear to the Jews during the long centuries of their dispersion under alien suppression, I slowly climbed up to the Holy Temple-Rock and its sacred precincts just before dawn. There I could observe groups of Palestinian Arabs freely responding to this early Adzan-call for morning worship, and I soon heard the solemn Arabic prayer-recitations of this devout congregation. The surprising encounter with this praying community of the greatest monotheistic world religion surrendering themselves to the one God and Creator in faithful worship was a deeply stirring experience.

A Deep Spiritual Experience.

Of a sudden the morning-sun rose over the Mount of Olives

casting a radiant glow of brightness over the magnificent golden Dome of the Rock. It struck a new chord in my heart; it was like a symbol of new light and insight ahead, and of still undiscovered realms of religious truth and spiritual experience. The deep impression of this moment has never since left me; it did encourage me during the difficult research-task for my doctorate thesis on the Essenic influences in early Christianity and the canonical New Testamental Writings; it guided me throughout my later work as priest and educationist here in Malaysia.

Allah the Greatest

Allahu Akbar, God alone is the greatest, even greater than the triune deity as professed by Christian dogma, in which I had been raised from childhood and which in later years of ecclesiastical studies I have been specially trained to proclaim, as a priestly member of a Roman Catholic Missionary Order.

A New Religious Message

The public declaration of the monotheistic faith of Islam from the minaret above the Jerusalem Temple sounded to me like a new religious message of great challenging force. Several years of post-graduate studies in the field of Comparative Religion and special research of the Essenic Movement during the time of Jesus and its impact on the development of early Christianity, have led me convincingly into the radiant light and truth of Islam, bringing me closer to the original message of Jesus, the godsent man and prophet of Nazareth who called his followers back onto the right religious way of the Jewish prophets and patriarchs of old, like Abraham, surrendering themselves to the one and only God, Allah, Creator of all, and striving to establish in word and action real human brotherhood among their people.

The Living Islamic Truth

I consider myself extremely fortunate to have been sent later by my religious superiors to Malaysia, where I could study and experience more thoroughly the all-comprehensive living truth of

Islam as revealed to the last and greatest of Allah's messengers, the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.)

By officially embracing Islam as the best fulfillment of the genuine Christian faith in the original Good Message (Gospel) of Jesus, foretelling Allah's last universal Revelation through His greatest Messenger Muhammad in the divine Word of the Holy Quran, I had to repay my heavy spiritual debt to the many Muslim friends of mine in this country, who encouraged me by their word and example to choose for myself the Islamic Truth as the most positive directive force to a fuller individual life in submission to Allah's guidance as well as towards the unification of mankind in fraternal fellowship and peace.



15

Viacheslav Polosin

Former Archpriest of Orthodox Church

Russia

Viacheslav Polosin, a former priest of the Russian Orthodox church and chairman of the Committee of the Supreme Soviet on Freedom of Conscience, announced his conversion from Orthodoxy to Islam.

by Alexander Soldatov

Moskovskie novosti, 8-14 June 1999

Viacheslav Polosin, a former priest of the Russian Orthodox church and chairman of the Committee of the Supreme Soviet on Freedom of Conscience, recently announced his conversion from Orthodoxy to Islam. This unprecedented event of the adoption of the religion of the Prophet by a prominent Orthodox clergyman was a surprise for many. The former archpriest is suspected of psychological illness or of subtle political calculation. But he himself speaks of his own free, spiritual, philosophical choice.

As far as I know, this is the second time in your life when you have officially announced a change in your worldview?

From childhood I believed in God, in my spirit. Later, when I was in the university, I came across Orthodox literature and went to the church and found there something that I had not seen in philosophy classes. I do not regret that; I learned a lot there. I submitted my documents to the ecclesiastical seminary in 1979 and have now, after twenty years, given an interview to the journal "Musulmane;" these are two stages in the development of my life.

Interview with Musulmane

"Several years of intense work have brought me to the conclusion that the Koran does not contain an assimilation of the Creator God to his creation, humanity, which is anthropomorphism, the essence of paganism. There is no basis for the ritual practice of appeasing God like some kind of human ruler. . . . I have decided to bring my social status into conformity with my con-

victions and to bear public testimony that I consider myself a follower of the great tradition of the correct belief and of the prophets of monotheism, beginning with Abraham, and thus I do not consider myself any longer either a clergyman or a member of any Orthodox church. . . . As regards possible penalties, we all are mortal and all sooner or later will depart from this life, so it is better to depart from it abiding in the Truth and not in spiritual ambivalence or in the delusions of human fantasy. With regard to the practical difficulties, including the Arabic language, I must place my hopes in help and cooperation from my new brethren. "

How did your clerical path evolve?

Within the church circles of Moscow I was not "my own person." There also were family circumstances which forced me to request ministry in Central Asia. I served briefly in Frunze and somewhat longer in Dushanbe. There I dealt with Islamic culture and the eastern mentality for the first time, which made a deep impression on my soul. After half a year I was ignominiously deprived of my registration for disobedience to secular authorities, that is, to the commissioner for religious affairs. For three year I was not accepted anywhere and was in complete disgrace. In 1988, when perestroika began, I was offered a half-destroyed church near Obninsk. From there I was elected in 1990 as a member of the soviet of the RSFSR.

The position of the Moscow patriarchate

For the Moscow patriarchate, the announcement by Archpriest Viacheslav Polosin of his conversion to another faith came as a complete surprise. In the Department of External Church Relations his move is explained as instability of character and convictions and a quick "subsequent change" of religious views is predicted. In the patriarchate there is an inclination to let the matter drop, relying on the decision of Fr Viacheslav's ruling bishop, Archbishop Kliment of Kaluga and Borovsk.

Were you suspected of conversion to protestantism?

American protestants, who in 1991 arrived in Russia in abundance and whom I received, proposed that we begin our meeting with prayer. But I categorically objected, saying that this was a secular institution and that I protected freedom of conscience and thus there must not be any prayer here. I was cordial with protestants, but where this rumor that I wanted to adopt protestantism came from, I don't know.

For many it is a puzzle what your real position on the new law on freedom of conscience of 1997 is. Some consider you its author and some recall that you have frequently criticized the law itself.

As long as I am a state employee I cannot discuss the whole truth about this law. I participated in the writing of this law as one of fifteen members of the working group and I had very little influence. Then the law was presented to the duma where work on it went forward. I can consider myself a coauthor of what resulted from this work. But the demonization of the law was necessary to those circles and forces who figured on being able to make a name and money for themselves on the basis of the negative events that arose around the country. Actually the law upheld the principles of a secular state and maintained the situation.

Was your religious quest provoked by your displeasure with formal Orthodoxy?

While I was working in the state apparatus I began to see more clearly how various activities within the church or politics affect the life of the people. Some people try to interpret Christianity so as to justify the irresponsibility of the government, giving it an image of divine ordination.

There are similar examples in the history of the Islamic world: khans, Turkish sultans, palace intrigues of the Sublime Porte.

In the Koran viewing the government as "God's anointed" is strictly

forbidden. It is said that if someone usurps power and a Muslim tolerates this, then he is an accessory to this sin. In the Ottoman empire there was a stagnation of Muslim culture--the cult of the military, violence, slavery. Islam degenerated there. The Revelation itself is a different matter.

What has been the reaction of your new Muslim brethren to your decision?

My interview with the journal Musulmane provoked lively interest, so much so that it was necessary to put out another printing.

What has been the reaction on the part of your leadership in the duma?

Some naturally will be unhappy, but I don't care to please everyone. I think that nothing will change in my work in the duma. I do not intend to criticize Christianity. When I was within Orthodoxy, I criticized it rather harshly. Now I don't. Islam, as it is presented in the Koran, is the most democratic religion because it contains a prohibition of tyranny; vis-a-vis the Creator is the people, society on earth. There are no mediators of a priestly caste or anointed monarchs in the Koran.

Viacheslav Polosin's office

In the State Duma he occupies one office along with Murad Zaprishiev, a former deputy and now an employee of the staff of the duma Committee for Relations with Public Associations and Religious Organizations. In a prominent place in the office there is the Koran and the walls are decorated with Arabic inscriptions. In this office Polosin and his colleague sometimes perform their prayers, for which they use a special rug. At the same time, Viacheslav Sergeevich opposes making a demonstrative profession of Islam in his secular work and especially in governmental service.

Do you have plans to return to a more political life?

For the time being, no. I would prefer to use my profession and knowledge for socially useful activity within the bounds of Islam.

I see myself as a public and academic Islamic leader, but not a politician. But what the future will bring, only God knows. In 1990 my election as a deputy also was unexpected.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Viacheslav Sergeevich Polosin was born in 1956. In 1979 he graduated from the Philosophy Faculty of MGU and in 1984 from the Moscow Ecclesiastical Seminary. He was ordained a priest and served in parishes in the dioceses of Central Asia and Kaluga of RPTs. In 1990 he was elevated to the rank of archpriest. In the same year he was elected a people's deputy of RSFSR from Kaluga region and headed the committee of the Supreme Soviet on freedom of conscience. While working in the Supreme Soviet, he graduated from the diplomatic academy of the ministry of foreign affairs and defended his dissertation on the subject: "The Russian Orthodox church and the state in USSR, 1971-1991." From 1993 he has been an employee of the staff of the State Duma on relations with public associations and religious organizations. He was a member of the Russian Christian Democratic Movement and a member of the Council of Christian Organizations. In 1991 he went on leave from the Kaluga diocese and since 1995 he has not officiated in liturgies. In his interview with the Musulmane journal, he officially called himself a Muslim: "I consider that the Koran is the final Revelation on earth, sent down to the Prophet Muhammed. There is no God but the One God, Allah, and Muhammed is his Messenger." Viacheslav Polosin is the author of many scholarly works on historical,political, religious, and philosophical subjects. In February of this year he defended another dissertation on the subject: "The dialectics of myth and political myth-making." His basic philosophical ideas are presented in his book "Myth, Religion, and the State" (Moscow, 1999).

From the point of view of Islamic theologians, to convert to the

religion of the Prophet it is sufficient to recite the famous formula containing the profession of faith in the one God Allah and his prophet Muhammed. In doing so it is not important which language is used for reciting the formula. It is important that the recitation be made before two witnesses who are Muslim and can give written confirmation of the fact of the profession of Islam. The rite of circumcision, which many consider to be analogous to baptism in Christianity, is not obligatory for entrance into the Muslim umma. (tr. by PDS)



16

S.M. SULAYMAN

Former Baptist Church Minister

U.S.A.

I was raised and baptized in the Baptist church and spent much of my youth seriously studying the Bible and religious discipline. At a still young age, I entered. the Ministry.

There is an amazing number of things which the Christian reader of the New Testament misses even in the most thorough reading, because his frame of reference and his scrutiny are controlled carefully by official Church dogma. My own case is instructive. I was raised and baptized in the Baptist church and spent much of my youth seriously studying the Bible and religious discipline. At a still young age, I entered the Ministry. I thought I knew the Bible well. As paradoxical as it seems, I must admit that I never possessed as complete a knowledge of the Bible as a Christian as I have gained since embracing interpretation presents a puzzle with major parts missing, and those parts can be supplied only by Islam. The Christian sees the Bible as an end in itself, whereas in reality it is but an indicator pointing the way to something else which was then yet to come. Until this event occurred, the Bible was an incomplete, unfulfilled Book and many of its profound prophecies could not be grasped completely. Christian theologians and scholars, eager to impress their following, often erred in assigning premature "fulfillments" to those foregleams of the future. When the prophecies actually came true these erroneous conjectures had assumed the status of dogma, blinding Christian to the fruition of their own beliefs.

An exceptional example of the dangers of such hasty interpretation is the standard Christian exegesis of John 14:16 and 17, and 16:7-14. Giving Christian scholars the benefit of the doubt, we will assume that the accepted Greek text records in general the actual sayings of Jesus, peace be upon him. In these verses, Jesus highlights the brevity of his own mission, showing its intermediate status as a link between the prophetic past and the pro-

phetic future. It is significant that Jesus never called himself the last prophet, or even a universal prophet, thought Christians later came to consider him as both. On the contrary, here, when read carefully with regard to the Greek text rather than the creeds of the Establishment Churches, Jesus points specifically to the coming of another prophet after him who would (1) be eminently truthful and trustworthy, (2) teach only what God revealed, and (3) honour Jesus by carrying the prophetic mission on to its logical conclusion.

A characteristic of what is termed biblical prophecy is that it merely gives outlines, which become perfectly distinct only upon the unfolding of reality. Thus, we have not instance here of Jesus saying, in the unreal fashion of the Italian "Gospel of Barnabas", 'After me there shall come the Last Prophet, Muhammad bin Abdullah.' But biblical prophecy does have certain safeguards which make the intended interpretation sure beyond all doubt. The new Testament records Jesus as saying:

"Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in god, believe also in me . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . and I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter (Greek parakleetos), that he may abide with you for ever: even the spirit of truth." (John 14:1, 16, 17)Jesus says that the prophet who would come after him would be a true messenger commissioned by God who, like Jesus, would possess a heavenly Revelation from God, teaching, not words of his own composition, but whatever God gave him to speak:

"But when he, the spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you in all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear (from God) that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine and shall show unto you." (John 16:13, 14)

Thus, additionally, this coming prophet would not spurn the mission of Jesus, but would recognize it and actually "glorify" Jesus

by removing from association with him all the false doctrines with which others surrounded the name. Unlike the Jews in general, this prophet would not belie the mission of Jesus, but take the prophetic mission on to conclusion. Now, who would this be? Jesus calls him the "Paraclete". We cannot discount the opinion that what Jesus really said, in his own language of Aramaic, was nearer in meaning to the similar Greek word "Periclyte," "The Praised One," and that "John" ?? an unknown writer in the second century of the Christian era ?? picked up "Paraclete" in error. However, until positive textual evidence is available, we shall continue to give the benefit of the doubt, because even in its admittedly defective condition, the light of truth shines forth in it with startling brilliance.

"Paraclete" as "the Comforter," though that is not precisely what "paraclete" means. Even so, "Comforter" would be an acceptable title for the one who is the Mercy for all creatures. What "Paraclete" means, though, is an advocate, one who pleads the cause of another, one who counsels or advises. The word points to one who would be an advocate for and counsellor to mankind, who, as the Qur'an puts it, would be harisun alaikum, "solicitous for your welfare" (Likewise, in English "solicitor" is synonymous with "advocate" in the legal sense.) Another indication which acts as a safeguard for the true meaning of these verses is that the "Paraclete" is also given the title "Spirit of Truth" (Greek to pneuma tees aleetheais). This is clear when one realises that in New Testament Greek, pneuma can mean "possessor of a spiritual communication", i.e., an inspired person, as well as a "spirit" per se. (A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament, by the Rev. Thomas S. Green). Thus, to pneuma tees alletheasis. "the inspired truthful one," means that the "paraclete" would be so truthful and trustworthy in discharging his responsibilities to the Divine Revelation that "the Truth" or "the Trustworthy" would be identifying titles for him. The Greek Allethees

corresponds exactly with the Arabic Amin, and "Al-Amin", "the Trustworthy", was an early title of Muhammad, peace be upon him.

Some hasty editor was not satisfied with the expression "spirit of truth", or did not understand it, and assumed that this must be the same as the "Holy Spirit." The words at John 14:26 which identify the "Paraclete" as the Holy Spirit are the result of this. Such words are found nowhere else and are obviously an addition to the text. Yet, this premature interpretation, unsound textually, is the one generally accepted by the Church for explaining who the "Paraclete" is! But Jesus has spoken of someone who would dwell physically with mankind, advising and counselling them, in effect, "pleading their case" with God and showing them to sure way of return, by adherence to the truth, to the Divine Judge. He was not someone who was already present, but someone yet to come. As for the holy spirit, the angel of revelation, his presence was already manifest. David knew him, and asked God, "take not Thy holy spirit from." (Psalm 51:11). The holy spirit was present already during the ministry of Jesus, a fact which the New Testament acknowledges abundantly (f. Matthew 3:16, 17; 12:27-33, etc.) It would have been ridiculous and redundant for Jesus to speak of the future coming (He shall/will give you...") of what presently existed.

Jesus points to a fundamental distinction between the "Paraclete" and all other prophets: "that he may abide with you for ever." This is the same as saying: "the Last Prophet whose mission has permanence, voiding the need for any additional prophets," In plain English, Jesus is saying: "Look, I must go away soon, my mission among you having been completed. But I will ask our Lord to send for all of you another counsellor the prophet who will stand as your guide until the end of time.'

To prove conclusively that "John" understood the "Paraclete" to be a flesh and blood person, not a disembodied spirit or an an-

gel, in another New Testament book attributed to him (1 John 2:1) he used the same term with reference to Jesus: "We have an advocate (Greek parakleetos, same word rendered "Comforter" earlier) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Jesus, as God's messenger, was considered to be a "Paraclete"; the term was thus not understood by early Christians to mean someone supernatural. The fact is that "Paraclete" or "Counsellor" or "Advocate" refers to a human being, an inspired person ?? which is a legitimate meaning of pneuma ??
not a "spirit" per se. In practical terms, the meaning of "Paraclete" is nearly synonymous with "prophet", with emphasis on the teaching and counselling aspects of prophethood. If Jesus said "another Paraclete" at John 14:16, the significance is "another prophet, out-standing for his teaching and counselling." Furthermore, Jesus qualifies this "Paraclete" by terming him the one to "abide ... for ever," the last or permanent one. There is yet another possibility for the serious researcher. There are numerous instances in the history of biblical textual transmission wherein words have been added inadvertently to the Hebrew and Greek texts; likewise, there are instances wherein words, indeed, complete sentences, have been omitted inadvertently from those texts by copyists, especially where the letters of the omitted word were similar to another word which preceded or followed it. In the ancient texts, the letters were all run together, without spacing, so that Jesus' words at John 14:16 would have looked like this in the Greek text:
KAIEGOEROOTEESOOTONPATERAKAIALLON-
PARAKLEETONDOOSEIMIN.
Later, words were spaced so that we have:
KAI EGO EROOTEESOO TON PATERA KAI AL-
LON PARAKLEETON DOOSEI UMIN. (And I will
ask the Father, and he will give you another
Paraclete.")

The point is that the received Greek text's "Paraclete" may not be a corruption of "periclyte". The original text might well have contained both words, but one became omitted in later copying because of being so close in position and in spelling to the other. Only further research can resolve the matter, but it is quite possible that what Jesus said originally was along these lines:
"I will request our Lord, and He will send you another Counsellor, the Praised One, who will be permanent for you until the end of time."
This is not entirely hypothetical; it has actually happened with other words and sentences of the Greek New Testament.
Nevertheless, there is no one else in all of history that John 14:16 et seq. could refer to but Muhammad bin Abdullah, peace be upon him. Christians admit that these verses do not refer to Jesus himself, and the premature identification of the "Paraclete" with the Holy Spirit is untenable in view of other verses of the Bible. Further, no one else has come as a prophet giving due recognition to the mission of Jesus ("He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine . . .") (John 16:14). No one else has led mankind into "all truth" (John 16:13). Only one man has received God's Revelation since the time of Jesus, and only one man stands as Counsellor and Advocate ("Paraclete") for mankind for all the ages to come, Praised ("Periclyte") by God and some 1000 millions of the human family.

